

# Death and Mr Pickwick

## Chronicles - Volume 1

by Stephen Jarvis



# December 8, 2014



- ▶ The moment when I begin the final proof-reading of *Death and Mr Pickwick!!!*
- ▶ The novel is, deliberately, the same length as *The Pickwick Papers* - at just over 800 pages, or 1600 as proofs - to create a similar sense of a journey for readers.
- ▶ When I have completed the corrections, my involvement with writing the novel at last comes to an end...

# December 30, 2014



- ▶ I went to London yesterday with my mate Steve Colquhoun and we took photos of sites related to *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Some might say it was nothing but an excuse to go on a pub crawl...but what is *The Pickwick Papers* but an 800 page pub crawl? We started at the famous George Inn in Southwark. This is London's only surviving galleried coaching inn, and is the place to capture a sense of the White Hart Inn, where Mr Pickwick first met Sam Weller.



Although the White Hart Inn no longer survives, it was located in Borough High Street, just a very short distance from The George, and there is still a White Hart Yard sign and a plaque which mentions *The Pickwick Papers*.



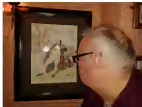


- After that, we went to The Old Red Lion in Islington. In *Death and Mr Pickwick*, readers will encounter Seymour's great rival, the artist George Cruikshank, sitting at the bar.



- After conducting detailed and extensive research in the hostelrys of Islington, it was getting late, but we managed to snap this pic at 377 Liverpool Road. In the garden of this corner house, poor Robert Seymour's life came to an end...and, in a sense, *Death and Mr Pickwick* began.

## January 9



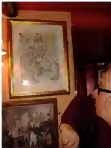
- ▶ One can still see a few survivals from the age of caricature - from which *The Pickwick Papers* emerged - on pub walls. Yesterday I went to a local hostelry, The Bee at Burnham, Berkshire, where there is a caricature mentioned in *Death and Mr Pickwick*, James Gillray's *A Voluptuary Under the Horrors of Digestion*. It shows the Prince of Wales gorging himself.





- ▶ *A Voluptuary Under the Horrors of Digestion* by James Gillray.





- ▶ Also at The Bee at Burnham was an example of the "unrestrained" humour which existed in caricatures just prior to *Pickwick*, and which was swept away by a new wave of public morality. At first sight, the picture looks like a map showing the coasts of England and France, with a fleet of vessels in the sea. But take a closer look, and you realise that the map of England has been slightly distorted so as to resemble a person's lower quarters, and those are NOT ships heading towards France...



## January 10



- Yesterday I received a proof copy of the American edition of the novel, which will be distributed in advance of publication to reviewers and booksellers. Most delightful of all was a special bookmark produced for this edition, featuring Mr Pickwick. (You can see it poking out of the pages.) I became emotional when I saw the bookmark - it was as though Mr Pickwick had come alive again. Or I might say: it seemed that Robert Seymour was a working artist once more. Seymour killed himself nearly 179 years ago, but it was as though, in 2015, his greatest creation had returned to the world.



- The bookmark.



► The flipside.

## January 17



- ▶ Since *Pickwick* was published, thousands of different items of *Pickwickiana* have appeared. A few years ago, my wife Elaine bought me these *Pickwick* cigarette-cards.



- More *Pickwick* cigarette cards.

## January 24



- Nuria Reina Bachot, the translator of *The Railway Children* into Spanish, is a good friend of mine, and she has just sent me three photos of *Pickwick*-themed items. First up is a cigarette tin, from the 1970s, showing Mr Pickwick at Dingley Dell.





- Now, Mr Pickwick cocktail napkins.



- And here is a *Pickwick* tin, with an interpretation of Seymour's *Mr Pickwick Addresses the Club* by another artist. If you see anything *Pickwick*-themed, or named after *Pickwick*, do please send me a photo! The only cultural phenomenon comparable to *Pickwick* is The Beatles...and *Pickwick* was bigger than The Beatles! And just as there are many pieces of Beatles memorabilia, so there are many pieces of *Pickwickiana*.

# January 25



- I have just been sent this ad for Pickwick Ale by Tim Wright, of The Pickwick Pub and Restaurant in Duluth, MN, USA.

# January 25



- ▶ Some of *Death and Mr Pickwick* is set in modern times and, in order to emphasise the modernity, I have included mentions of rock and pop music in the text - for instance Bob Dylan's *Not Dark Yet*.
- ▶ <http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=RZg8hyU4lvQ>

# January 27



- ▶ Another piece of music mentioned in *Death and Mr Pickwick* is Queen's *The Show Must Go On*. The lyrics to this song would make a fine accompaniment to the tragedy of the dying clown in the book.
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t99KHOTR-J4>

# January 28



- ▶ Still on the theme of dying clowns, here is *Death of a Clown* by the Kinks, another song mentioned in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. (Strictly speaking, the song was released as a Dave Davies solo single, but also released on the Kinks album *Something Else*.)

- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5HjrJ1aw40>

# January 28



- ▶ I have just established contact with singer-songwriter Chris Wade, of the music project Dodson and Fogg, which takes its name from the crooked lawyers in *The Pickwick Papers*. You can find out more about Dodson and Fogg at:
- ▶ <http://wisdomtwinsbooks.weebly.com/dodson-and-fogg.html>
- ▶ The music of Dodson and Fogg is also on Spotify. Check out *Hear it in the Morning Still*.

## January 29



- The Alehouse in Reading, Berkshire is a gem of a pub, with rapidly-changing guest ales, and its walls are decorated with hundreds of brewers' pump-badges - it is worth a trip to this pub to see the pump-badges alone. I spotted this subtle *Pickwick*-themed badge.





- The Alehouse used to be called The Hobgoblin, which of course reminded me that goblins appear in *Pickwick*, in the tale of Gabriel Grub, as illustrated by Seymour's successor, Hablot Browne.



- But the town of Reading has a more substantial connection to *Pickwick*: Dickens dedicated *The Pickwick Papers* to Reading's MP, Thomas Noon Talfourd, who appears as a character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Talfourd was known for a speech impediment - he could not pronounce the letter "R". So he would have described himself as "The Member of Parliament for Weading".

## January 30



- ▶ More music from the modern-day sections of *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Here is another Dylan song, *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall*, as covered by Bryan Ferry. This record meant a lot to me as a teenager, with its amazing, apocalyptic lyrics, and Ferry's cover was the song that got me into Dylan. So although, in the novel, I refer to Dylan's *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall*, I was really thinking of Ferry's version.
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zwBHd4kU10>

# January 31



- ▶ I recently made contact with *Mugby Junction Coffee Experience*, a family-owned business in Winona, Minnesota. It's a cafe and a drive-thru...and they also sell *Pickwick Blend* coffee. I tried it at breakfast this morning, and it has a sweet, nutty aftertaste. *Mugby Junction's* Carew Halleck told me: "*The Pickwick Blend* is the first blend we came up with at *Mugby Junction*. It truly has been our Old Reliable, withstanding the test of time."



- But how did the coffee come to be named *Pickwick*? Well, close to *Mugby Junction* is a town which is actually called...*Pickwick*. Yes, *The Pickwick Papers* was SO famous, and its effect upon the world SO profound, that entire towns came into existence called *Pickwick*!

## February 1



- ▶ More music from *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Here is Blur's *Parklife*. Incidentally, Phil Daniels, who appears in the video, played the role of Mr Pickwick's manservant Sam Weller in a BBC production of *The Pickwick Papers*.
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1Tzhu8raBw>

## February 1



- ▶ Simon Carmio, the husband of my cousin Sylvia Carmio-Jarvis, has just posted a short video about the unveiling of Robert Seymour's tombstone at the Charles Dickens Museum on July 20 2010.
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkOZfsbYQzA>

## February 1



- ▶ David Snowden, the author of *Writing the Prizefight: Pierce Egon's Boxer's World*, has just sent me this picture from the *Pickwick*-forerunner *Life in London*:
- ▶ [the wine-merchant] politely pressed the trio to descend into a vault, to taste some capital wines which he had recently purchased [...] Logic, with a grin, said to Jerry, "It was not only a good move, but there was a great deal of taste about it."



## February 1



- ▶ Here is a wonderful drawing of Samuel Pickwick by Paul Bommer! It was the first in a short series of images which Paul created for the *Spitalfields Life* blog a few years ago.
- ▶ <http://spitalfieldslife.com/2011/02/16/the-brick-lane-temperance-association/>

## February 1



- ▶ Simon Carmio has posted a second video showing scenes from the unveiling of Seymour's tombstone at the Charles Dickens Museum.
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAnzZByEKr4>

## February 2



- More Pickwickian brilliance by Paul Bommer.

## February 3



- Here is Paul Bommer's take on Sam Weller's father, Tony Weller.

## February 4



- Recently, I went to the Great Expectations pub in Reading, Berkshire. It is a cornucopia of Pickwickiana.















- ▶ Two items on the walls of The Great Expectations have particular relevance to *Death and Mr Pickwick*.
- ▶ The first is a reproduction of Dickens's marriage certificate. Shortly after returning from his honeymoon, Dickens wrote to Seymour, criticising the drawing of the dying clown, and inviting the artist for a glass of grog. This leads to a key scene in the novel - the fateful confrontation between Dickens and Seymour.



- The other item is the unfinished picture *Dickens's Dream*, by Robert Buss, the artist who was fired from the *Pickwick* job, and left mentally scarred by the experience. Buss worked on this picture at the very end of his life, as though determined to prove that he could have been a worthy successor to Seymour.

## February 5



- The other day, Elaine and I went to Hoxton in London, and she took this picture of me outside the last surviving part of the Naval Maniacs' Asylum. In *Death and Mr Pickwick*, Seymour and his friend Joseph Severn walk by the asylum, and make facetious noises of cannonfire as they pass the railings. Much later in the novel, a mad sailor indeed makes an appearance.



- Not far away, at 63 Pitfield Street, is a pub with a name known to readers of *The Pickwick Papers* - The George and Vulture. Of course, this is not The George and Vulture - the one that appears in Dickens's novel - but given the name, we had to pay a visit, and had a fine pint of Bengal Lancer.

## February 6



- ▶ Here is another of Paul Bommer's *Pickwick* drawings, showing the Wellers, father and son. The original picture by Phiz, on which Paul's drawing is loosely based, represented an early example of product placement - it featured a Guinness advertisement in the background.
- ▶



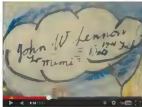
- ▶ And more Bommer brilliancel  
Although *The Pickwick Papers* has been described as "a hymn to booze", there were elements in society, depicted in *Pickwick* (and shown in Paul's drawing) who campaigned against alcohol.
- ▶ The amount of drink in *Pickwick* indeed became highly controversial - in the 1920s, American prohibitionists campaigned to ban *Pickwick* from public libraries.





- ▶ Here is another Paul Bommer picture of the Wellers. The conjunction of fat and thin, as in this picture, was a recurring motif of *The Pickwick Papers*. There seems to be a "geometric" aspect to *Pickwick*, in which circular shapes (fat men, for instance) are placed next to straight lines (thin men).

## February 7



- ▶ More music from the modern-times sections of *Death* and *Mr Pickwick*. This is John Lennon's *Working Class Hero*. This song appears in a short scene set on the day of Lennon's assassination. The song's not a particular favourite of mine, but it seemed the obvious one to choose: The Beatles were the only cultural phenomenon that could be considered a rival to *Pickwick* - though *Pickwick* was bigger - and, Mr *Pickwick*'s manservant, Sam Weller, was the original working class hero.
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njG7p6CSbCU>

## February 7



- ▶ The one-legged Thomas Burton - illustrated here by Paul Bommer - gets a brief mention in my novel.
- ▶ A few years ago, I met the members of The Manchester Pickwick club - a fraternal organisation, who in the best traditions of *Pickwick*, are known to drink a drop or two. One member theorised that wooden legs last longer when a man becomes a temperance advocate, because the wood doesn't rot so quickly when there is less necessity to use back alleys to relieve oneself, and you don't p\*ss on the wood so often!

## February 8



- The Iron Duke pub in Mayfair is decorated with memorabilia relating to the Duke of Wellington, but it also has a connection to a character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*: the nineteenth-century cartoonist William Heath. The pub's sign shows Heath's portrayal of the Duke as a boot.



- And on the staircase leading down to the pub's toilets are a number of other cartoons by Heath, including *The Prime-Ear* with Wellington shown as a donkey.



- ▶ Though largely forgotten nowadays, William Heath is hugely significant in the history of cartooning - his magazine *The Glasgow Looking Glass* is arguably the world's first comic book.



- ▶ William Heath would have been in his element among the memorabilia in the Iron Duke. I can imagine him standing at the bar, boasting of his own great military exploits - for he seems to have been a military fantasist, who claimed to have served King and country, when there is no evidence whatsoever of his having any military service at all. /

## February 9



- My friend Jamie Johnston spotted the following clue in Saturday's Jumbo Crossword in *The Times*: "Photo shoot at Wembley perhaps involving women's club president." Now, I have never had any ability at crosswords myself, but Jamie explained to me: Photo = pic. Shoot at Wembley perhaps = kick. Involving women's = w in kick. Club president is the definition part of the clue... therefore the answer to 5 across is PICKWICK.



## February 10



- ▶ Here is Paul Bommer's portrayal of the Reverend Stiggins from *The Pickwick Papers*. Stiggins appears in *Pickwick* long after Seymour's death - but in 1838, an engraver called Weld Taylor visited Dickens, and he saw a picture, by Seymour, which he was convinced was Stiggins. Indeed, Dickens gave Taylor the picture as a present. It is another indication that the origin-story that we have been told about *The Pickwick Papers* is not true - that Dickens and Seymour were involved in long-term planning about the course of *The Pickwick Papers*.

## February 11



- Pierce Egan, the author of *Life in London*, the hugely successful forerunner to *Pickwick*, appears as a character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Egan invented a cocktail, called the Tom & Jerry, which was named after two characters in *Life in London*. It is a concoction of eggs, brandy, rum, hot milk, sugar and various spices, which I ordered the other day in the Polo Bar in the Westbury Hotel, Mayfair. It is a sort of eggnog, with a cappuccino-like froth. Not unpleasant, but I don't think I'll try it again!

## February 12

**There were three men  
came out of the west  
their fortunes for to try.  
And these three men made  
a solemn vow**

**John Barleycorn  
must die**



- ▶ Time for more music from *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Today, it's *John Barleycorn*. Two of the recurring motifs in the novel are death and alcohol - and *John Barleycorn* neatly combines both in a single song, in which the processes used to turn barley into alcohol are represented as vicious, death-delivering attacks. The song is very old, and exists in countless versions, but I have been listening to a version by Traffic.

- ▶ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Gp\\_Q8P9ocWc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Gp_Q8P9ocWc)

## February 13



- One of my birthday presents this year from Elaine was this old plaque, showing Seymour's *Mr Winkle and the Refractory Steed*. It might seem an innocent picture, but actually, as readers of *Death and Mr Pickwick* will discover, the picture represents more evidence that the "accepted" origin of *Pickwick* simply isn't true....

## February 13



- ▶ Joe Murphy, who plays in the band Sergeant Buzfuz, has just posted this photo of his cat Pickwick, who, like Mr Pickwick, is spending her retirement living in East Dulwich.

## February 14



- ▶ A literary text can contain half-concealed allusions, in-jokes, and obscure puns...things to keep scholars occupied for years! *Positively 4th Street* by Bob Dylan appears "encoded" in this way in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. I know of no other song which expresses such bitterness, right from its opening line "You gotta lotta nerve to say you are my friend."

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5s0vdt8gz3Q>

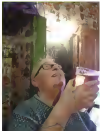
▶

## February 15



- ▶ Before Seymour became a caricaturist, he worked as an oil painter. One of his paintings, inspired by the verse epic *Jerusalem Delivered*, by the Italian poet Torquato Tasso, was exhibited at the Royal Academy's summer exhibition. The painting has been missing for years, but last summer, Elaine and I travelled around Italy, and we stayed for a day in Sorrento, birthplace of Tasso. As a tribute to Seymour's lost painting, we had a meal at the Tasso Pizzeria. And, as a souvenir of that meal, here is a Tasso-themed sugar packet.

## February 16



- ▶ A couple of weeks ago, I mentioned The Alehouse pub in Reading, which has hundreds of beer-pump badges upon its walls, and that one badge features Mr Pickwick. Astonishingly, another visit to the pub revealed a second Mr Pickwick badge. This badge is difficult to see, as it is on the ceiling, close to the entrance...





- ...but here it is! (The blurriness of the photo is, of course, deliberate, to reflect the state of my vision after several very strong pints of real ale...)

## February 16



- ▶ The mug that Beth Fantackey has posted here shows a *Pickwickian* scene of tremendous cultural significance. The idea that Christmas should ideally be associated with snow and ice started with *The Pickwick Papers*. In the original serial-parts issue of *Pickwick*, Dickens's portrayal of a white Christmas happened to coincide with a heavy snowstorm in the real world, when the part was published. The result was a fusion of reality and fiction that has never left us, even though Christmas in England is rarely snowy.
- ▶ Beth says: "Here's an admittedly not-so-great picture of a mug I purchased years ago at the Dickens House Museum in London. It features an image of Mr. Pickwick attempting to ice skate - one of my favorite scenes from *The Pickwick Papers*. You can see that it's cracked, so no more drinking tea from it, but I like to keep it on my desk."

## February 18



- ▶ Todd Compton recently sent me a list, compiled by the author Roald Dahl, of "Five Books to Take to a New Planet." Four of the books were: *The Oxford English Dictionary*, a medical textbook, and musical scores for Beethoven's piano sonatas and Bach's *B Minor Mass*. The fifth, the sole representative of the world's imaginative literature, was *The Pickwick Papers*. That's right - Dahl chose *Pickwick* above Shakespeare, Homer, Tolstoy, Cervantes or anybody else's work.



- ▶ When I mentioned this to Elaine, she pointed out that Dahl's granddaughter Sophie is married to the musician Jamie Cullum.
- ▶ Cullum has recorded *If I Ruled the World*, Mr Pickwick's song from the musical *Pickwick*. I think Cullum adds an ominous mood to the song, which accords very well with *Death and Mr Pickwick*.
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgcmlkRePW8>

## February 19



- ▶ The *Pickwick Papers* is full of scenes of food and feasting - and, as I have tried to parallel *Pickwick* in various ways, there is plenty of eating action in *Death and Mr. Pickwick* too. One food in *The Pickwick Papers* is pickled walnuts. I do mention pickled walnuts in *Death and Mr. Pickwick*, but I had never actually eaten them, until today.
- ▶ Anyway, I opened a jar of Opie's pickled walnuts...and they have a superb, subtle sweetness. They do look a little strange when you fork one out of the jar - like a fungus-coal hybrid - but my advice is: overcome any misgivings and get that walnut in your kisser!

## February 20



- ▶ Yesterday, I bought garlic, and there could be but one choice for the brand: La Mancha Mauve, grown in the Spanish region of La Mancha, made famous by Don Quixote.
- ▶ Cervantes' novellas at the heart of *The Pickwick Papers* - Pickwick could be thought of as the Quixote transplanted to British soil, with fat and thin characters reversed: so, instead of the thin Don Quixote, we have the fat Mr Pickwick, and instead of the fat Sancho Panza, we have the thin Sam Weller. Also, Don Quixote's mad delusions have their counterpart in Mr Pickwick's gullibility, for Mr Pickwick will accept the truth of any story told to him, even a story about goblins jumping around the tombstones of a churchyard at Christmas (*The Tale of Gabriel Grub*).

## February 21



- A photo of a *Pickwick*-mural in the Dutch town of Deventer, taken by Marleen Hulst.

## February 22



- ▶ Robert Seymour was the first artist ever to illustrate a work by Dickens. Seymour produced a work called *Seymour's Comic Album* which, in the days before a well-developed copyright law, consisted of prose pieces stolen from various magazines, accompanied by fresh pictures by Seymour. One of these pieces, called *The Omnibus*, was an extract from Dickens's story *The Bloomsbury Christening*.





- And this is Seymour's small, but historic, picture which accompanied *The Omnibus*.

## February 22



- ▶ When he was a young man, Seymour was concerned with physical fitness, and he regularly went to a gym in Islington, where his great artistic rival, George Cruikshank, also worked out. Indeed, Seymour drew this picture of a gymnasium in St James's Street, London.



- ▶ However, by the time he shot himself, Seymour had lost all interest in his physique, and his stomach had ballooned. This is shown by the second picture which Seymour drew for Dickens's story *The Tuggs's at Ramsgate*. A contemporary of Seymour noted that the artist had put on weight before his death, and said that the fat man in the foreground of the picture was actually a portrayal of Seymour himself.

## February 23



- I have just seen the full back-and-front jacket art for the UK edition of *Death and Mr Pickwick*, with its aged-paper look.

## February 24



- ▶ This is the last picture that Seymour completed before he shot himself - an illustration for an anonymous story *The Landlord of Royston* in Chapman & Hall's *Library of Fiction*, which tells of an old man wooing a young woman. Note the sexual symbols: the stiff, long-necked flask beside the goblets, the cat rubbing itself against the man's leg, the offer of pearls. Ironically, one character in the story says 'I can no longer bear to be as I am' - and the next morning, Seymour tore his heart apart with a blast from a fowling gun. It is interesting too that Dickens, in the special notice about Seymour's death which was inserted into the second serial part of *Pickwick*, claimed that Seymour's last picture was the Dying Clown in *Pickwick* and that Seymour was working on it up to a late hour of the night preceding the suicide. This appears to be a blatant lie, probably a ghastly attempt to attract buyers to *Pickwick*, who would believe they were buying the last work of a famous artist. It was the beginning of Dickens's rewriting of history concerning Seymour.

## February 25



- ▶ Yesterday, *The Times* published an obituary for a river keeper, Mick Lunn. One would not normally expect an obituary in a national newspaper for a man doing such a job - but then, Lunn was not just any river keeper. He was Head Keeper for the world's most exclusive angling club, The Houghton Club. And this club, founded in 1822, is featured in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. The obituary noted that, in the nineteenth century, the artists Sir Edward Landseer and JWM Turner gave the club sketches during their visits - and so did another artist, a certain Robert Seymour.



- ▶ I paid the club two visits, to examine their records. And how interesting they were. The first thing which suggests that there is a connection between the Houghton Club and *The Pickwick Papers* is the date the club was founded - 1822. This was also the year The Pickwick Club was founded, according to the advertising prospectus issued for *The Pickwick Papers*. The prospectus also noted the involvement of The Pickwick Club with the London financial district of Lothbury - and is it a coincidence that one of the founders of the Houghton Club was also a director of a bank in Lothbury? Here is a Seymour picture, drawn for a leading member of the Houghton club, Richard Penn.

## February 26



- ▶ A couple of days ago, I posted the last picture Seymour completed before his suicide. However, a few more of his pictures appeared posthumously in the magazine *Figaro in London*, a forerunner of *Punch* magazine, including this picture recording the blowing up of a statue of King William III in Dublin.



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#### DEATH OF DON JAMES.

We stop the press, with the deepest regret, to announce the death of our highly talented artist, DON JAMES, whose untimely going impaired both a volume of *Illustrations* in our paper. We have furnished by us a few more of his sketches, which will appear in our subsequent Nos.; and have inserted the portrait of another gentleman of fine talents.

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—A. M. 1840.

- In the same issue of *Figaro*, this black-bordered death notice was inserted.



- In the following issue, there was a rough draft of a Seymour picture showing the Duke of Wellington with "cure all" pills.



- Finally, the magazine published another draft picture about collecting tithes in Ireland, which was billed as "Seymour's Last Sketch". And so, in that issue of *Figaro*, dated May 7 1836, the public career of the most prolific cartoonist of the era came to an end.

## February 27



- ▶ My editor at Random House, Don Franklin, recently asked me over lunch: "What is your favourite part of *Death and Mr Pickwick*?" You may be surprised to discover that my favourite part does not involve Seymour at all, but concerns a character called 'Mr H', a *Pickwick*-obsessive, based upon a real person called C. M. Neale.
- ▶ Neale spent fifteen years of his life cataloguing every word in *The Pickwick Papers*. This was to produce Neale's unpublished work *The Pickwick Concordance*, which has vanished. However, an earlier work of Neale's on *Pickwick*'s words, his *Index to Pickwick*, has survived, and was indeed published in 1897. But fifteen years was not the longest period spent by one person on a single *Pickwickian* quest. Consider devoting FIFTY YEARS to *Pickwick*. I shall write about this tomorrow.

## February 28



- ▶ In the British Library, there is a green box containing all the serial parts of *The Pickwick Papers*, as collected by a certain John F. Dexter. It is the most valuable copy of *Pickwick* in the world - the result of Dexter's search for 'a perfect *Pickwick* in Parts'. A search which took him FIFTY YEARS to complete. If it could ever be said to be complete, for Dexter was always on the look-out for a part which contained a rare typographical error, or had less foxing, or a wrapper spine with an absent chip. The photo of parts shown here would not have satisfied Dexter - it would be far too flawed. Dexter particularly valued the advertising leaflets which were inserted into the serial parts - things which became exquisitely rare simply because most readers threw them away.

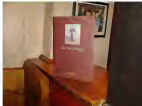


- Collectors of first-edition Pickwicks compile lists of typographical errors and printing variations, such as the twenty-page monograph shown here *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club - Some New Bibliographical Discoveries*.



- This is an area of the title-page of a first-edition *Pickwick* showing one such variation. It depicts the sign above the door of a pub. It should say "Tony Weller", but in certain copies, like the one shown here, it says "Tony Veller".

## March 1



- ▶ On February 8, I posted about The Iron Duke pub in Mayfair, whose pub sign is based upon a cartoon by William Heath, who appears as a character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. The other day, I drank at another pub which features Heath's cartoon on its sign: the Duke of Wellington in Twyford, Berkshire.







- And I was especially delighted to see Heath's cartoon silhouetted on the pub's doormat.

## March 2



- ▶ This is an extraordinary photograph. Let me explain why.
- ▶ As some of you know, my wife Elaine backed *Death and Mr Pickwick* from the moment I told her the concept, and the novel could not have been written without her incredible support. It was a remarkable moment, then, when Elaine's father Peter sent us this photo of Elaine's mother Jeanne, posed before an old stagecoach. Peter had emigrated to Canada in the 1950s, but he returned to England, for about a year, with Jeanne, and the one year-old Elaine, and this photo dates from that time. In all likelihood, Elaine was with her father, as he took the picture. It was when I enlarged the photo, and saw the name of the coach, that I got the shock of my life...

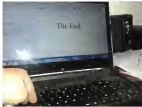


- Because this was the Commodore coach - the very coach that Mr Pickwick boarded at the start of *The Pickwick Papers*!!!



- And indeed, yesterday, when I was looking at the photo again, I noticed something I had not seen before: on the door of the coach, partially hidden by Jeanne's arm, is a picture of what looks like Mr Pickwick himself!
- Elaine and I often talk about this coincidence - as though Elaine's Pickwick-fate was sealed when she was one year old. Perhaps there is such a thing as destiny...

## March 3



- ▶ The novel took 5000000 long to complete, not only because of its length (800 pages - the same length, deliberately, as *Pickwick*) but also because of the mountain of research involved: the literature on *Pickwick* is vast - it used to be said that more had been written about *The Pickwick Papers* than any other work of fiction, and I can believe it. But when the text was finally done, I asked Elaine to add the last touch: I asked her to sit at my desk and type the d in the words *The End*. This would be the culmination of Elaine's *Pickwick*-destiny (see yesterday's post), and the photo below is a re-enactment of that moment. Alas, when I saw the printed proofs, I realised that the publishers' house style had resulted in the omission of the words *The End*. And so, Elaine's d must take its place alongside Shakespeare's missing play *The History of Cardenio*, and parts two and three of Gogol's *Dead Souls*, as one of the great lost masterpieces of world literature.

## March 4



- At first sight, the Waggon & Horses pub in Twyford, Berkshire, doesn't appear to have any *Pickwickiana* on display: there is a good friendly atmosphere, they serve a fine pint, there is a nice though slightly moody cat called *Maverick*, and even an aviary in the garden - but apparently nothing relating to *The Pickwick Papers*. But then on the wall, you notice a display-case containing some old branded products...



- And then you notice a box, in which Waverley pen-nibs were once sold...





- ▶ And then if you look in the top left-hand corner of the box you can see "The Pickwick Pen". This was another type of nib sold by the company, and the advertising jingle used for the nib-styles was once very famous: "They come as a boon and a blessing to men, The Pickwick, the Owl and the Waverley Pen." (Although the name 'Waverley' probably derives from Scott's Waverley novels, the 'Owl' is a bit mysterious. It has been suggested it refers to 'The owl and the pussycat'.)

## March 5



- ▶ An interesting connection exists between Robert Seymour and another British artist who killed himself, Edward Dayes (1763-1804) whose self-portrait is on the left. Though the details of Dayes' suicide are very sketchy, feelings of inadequacy and self-hatred were in all likelihood amplified when he took on the young Thomas Girtin (1775-1802), shown in the right hand picture, as an apprentice. The apprentice soon outshone the master, and Dayes cut short the apprenticeship. Girtin died young, and his widowed mother remarried, to a calico pattern designer called Thomas Vaughan. And who should be an apprentice to Vaughan? None other than a young Robert Seymour. One can imagine Girtin's mother telling the teenage Seymour that Dayes, in a fit of self-loathing, and sheer jealousy towards Girtin, took his own life, knowing that he had met an artist who possessed a greater talent than his own. Was something like that in the background of Seymour's mind when he met Dickens? Did Dayes' suicide "legitimate" his own?

## March 6



- ▶ On February 25, I mentioned the world's most exclusive angling club, the Houghton Club, founded in 1822, whose river keeper, Mick Lunn, was honoured recently with an obituary in *The Times*. Lunn also received an obituary in *The Daily Telegraph*, and this mentioned the Club's record books. A few years ago, I examined these records - because Seymour was involved with the club - and they could be seen as an embryonic version of the transactions of the Pickwick Club, the very papers of *The Pickwick Papers*.



- ▶ While waiting for the mayfly to rise, the trout-fishers of the Houghton would jot down whatever came to mind in their record-books, and also sketch pictures to accompany the writings - and they invited distinguished visiting artists like Seymour to add their own images. (A picture that Seymour drew for the Houghton member Richard Penn is shown here.) These records continued into modern times, and the *Telegraph* quoted an entry dated May 10 1940, showing the way the club responded to portentous events: "Germany today invaded Holland and Belgium, Mr Neville Chamberlain resigned and Mr Winston Churchill became PM. A warm bright day with a poor rise. Few fish moving."

## March 7



- ▶ Yesterday, I did my first interview about the novel, for the magazine *The Windsor*. The interviewer had read some of the text, and particularly liked an early section dealing with the writer William Combe, who was locked up in debtors' prison, where he earned an income by writing sermons for priests who couldn't be bothered to write them themselves.



- ▶ Combe was renowned for namedropping and for exaggerating his own exploits. He certainly knew Laurence Sterne, the author of *Tristram Shandy*, but in my novel, to capture his exaggeration, I have Combe claim that he suggested the idea for *Tristram Shandy*'s famous blank page to Sterne.



## March 8



- There are some pictures by Seymour in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle, so I spent a day in Windsor doing research...



- While in the town, I noticed a Goswell Hill, and a Goswell House - probably part of the old craze for naming locations after Mr Pickwick's residence in Goswell Street in London. Though it seems hard to believe today, there was a time when *The Pickwick Papers* made Goswell Street the most famous street in the world.



¶ Thus he governeth the world, calling the Myrrour of the  
 World, Now truely best of the prince and possessor  
 of good Myrrours



is not beyond comparing

¶ I might  
 to think  
 that being  
 our hope  
 our hope  
 the world. Of us that is  
 his name the danger  
 of our life but we are  
 of it. For we are not  
 to know our life is not  
 there certainly not there  
 to live. Of us that is not  
 truly of the world and

¶ Thus he that

- And talking of the world...the Royal Library also holds a copy of *The Mirror of the Worlde*, printed by Caxton in 1481 - the first book in England to be printed with illustrations. *The Mirror* therefore stands at the very start of the tradition which leads to *The Pickwick Papers*.

## March 9

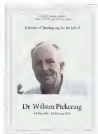


- Probably no book in history has so embodied the pleasures of alcohol as *The Pickwick Papers*. As *Death and Mr Pickwick* parallels *The Pickwick Papers* in many ways, there must necessarily be a 'pub crawl component' to my novel too. One pub mentioned in *Death and Mr Pickwick* is The Bull at Streatley, which I visited the other day. Henry Holmes, the ancestor of my friend Greg Holmes, was once the publican here.

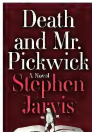
March 10



- ▶ A TRIBUTE TO A GREAT PICKWICKIAN.
- ▶ Some years ago, when I was doing research for *Death and Mr Pickwick*, I came across an article in a 2004 issue of the *British Medical Journal* entitled: 'Regularly imbibing Dickens may inspire healthfulness' by Dr William Pickering. It contained a wonderfully enthusiastic statement about *The Pickwick Papers* - Dr Pickering described *Pickwick* as "stupendously joyful". I made a note of Dr Pickering's name, knowing that at some point in the future, when *Death and Mr Pickwick* was finished, I would get in touch with him, and tell him the news about my novel...



- ▶ In January of this year, I did indeed send Dr Pickering an email - and received the following reply: "It is impossible to exaggerate the thrill of receiving your email, thank you for sending it. How I would love to meet you, or at least talk. Congratulations on getting out your book, I hope it is a rip roaring success. I should tell you I am writing as an inpatient from hospital, having been diagnosed with lung cancer (24.11.14). I downloaded Pickwick as soon as I was admitted, it is the only certain restorative I know. Imagine then my feelings upon receipt of your email. Nearly too much, tears. I hope to live long enough to enjoy your book. 'Who knows?'"



- ▶ I immediately sent Bill, as he became known to me, an uncorrected proof copy of the American edition of the book, writing as a dedication that I would remember forever his description of Pickwick as "stupendously joyful". We exchanged a few more emails, before he received the book, and then I heard from his partner Alma Sempie: "I delivered your book to Bill, who was so moved by the kind words you wrote that he actually cried. Unfortunately, his condition has since deteriorated further and he is now in a hospice and communication is very limited. I spent four days in his room last week and managed to speak to him for about half an hour on the last day. He has also become very photophobic and I don't quite know if he is able to read his emails. I know that he probably cannot answer any. It is a very difficult time and your book was certainly a ray of sunshine in the gloom. I will try to update you but, I am afraid, the prognosis is not good."



- ▶ I am sorry to say that Bill passed away on February 5, aged 64. The funeral took place on February 24 at All Saints' Church, Gosforth, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.
- ▶ With the help of his friend John Spiers, I have subsequently learnt more about Bill's extraordinary life, not only as a doctor, but as a botanist, and an environmentalist. He made a submission to the enquiry on the murderer Harold Shipman, he even went on an expedition to the mountains of the Hindu Kush. I just wish that I had got to know him earlier.
- ▶ But Maria's statement about "a ray of sunshine in the gloom" will always remain with me, as it echoes the opening line of *The Pickwick Papers*. Indeed, it echoes the opening line of my own novel.



- By request, there were no floral tributes at Bill's funeral, but donations to Macmillan Cancer ([www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)) were accepted instead. I made a donation, but I was also thinking that if I had sent flowers, it would have to be in the form of Pickwick crocuses. For Bill was a great Pickwickian and a great Dickensian. When he heard about my novel, he messaged John: "Isn't this amazing! What a lift for me. I can't believe it. AND I have 3 days ago downloaded *Pickwick* in here and am re-reading during night here in hospital. Love, Bill."

# March 11



- I originally intended to write a novel solely about Seymour, but when I came across a number of other intriguing characters connected to *The Pickwick Papers* I changed course, and expanded the novel, considerably, so that it became a fictionalised history of the entire *Pickwick* phenomenon. One of those characters who caught my attention was the writer Charles Whitehead - the man who turned down the chance of being Seymour's partner on the *Pickwick* project, regretted it afterwards, and ended his days as a broken-down drunk in Australia. No portrait of Whitehead exists, and so I have illustrated this post with a Seymour picture which accompanied the Whitehead short story *Some Passages in the Life of Francis Loosefish*, about a persistent debtor. Seymour's picture shows a bailiff arriving at the debtor's door. The experience almost certainly happened to Whitehead himself.



## March 12



THE DAFFY CLUB. A Historical Illustration of the Daffy Club.

- The Daffy Club, a group of heavy-drinking boxing enthusiasts who used to meet at The Castle Tavern in Holborn, London, exert a great influence on Seymour in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. But an interesting question is: why are they called The Daffy Club?



- 'Daffy' refers to a quack remedy, Daffy's Elixir, the universal treatment for all illnesses and woes, invented by a certain Thomas Daffy in about 1650. However, by the early nineteenth century, 'daffy' had become a euphemism for gin.



- In my novel, Pierce Egan says to Seymour in the Daffy Club: "But ask yourself, Mr Seymour: what is the real universal treatment for all illnesses and woes? There is one answer: gin, Mr Seymour, gin! So let's have some, and cure ourselves!"



- And the other day I was delighted to discover that the singer Bryan Scary has recorded an album called *Daffy's Elixir*!

# March 13



- ▶ *The Pickwick Papers* has a number of inset stories - characters break away from the flow of the narrative, and tell a tale to the other characters. As *Death and Mr Pickwick* parallels *The Pickwick Papers* in various ways, I include inset stories too. One concerns Chunes the elephant.
- ▶ A character points to a line in *The Pickwick Papers* and he says: "I've been wondering what this means, here." He reads aloud: "Ahl! They're like the elephants. They feel it now and then and it makes 'em wild!"  
"You obviously don't know about Chunes the elephant," says another character. "Do you want to hear about him?"  
"If it will keep me from thinking, yes."  
"Let me get myself another cup of ale first."



- And so the tale is told of the elephant that was kept in the menagerie at Exeter Change, London. Chunee went wild, and the order was given for him to be put down. It took an hour of sustained musket-fire.



- Afterwards, coloured prints were sold, depicting the elephant's slaughter. Chuneer was then dissected, and nothing went to waste: his hide was used to make leather goods, his meat was sold by butchers - accompanied by recipes for elephant stew.



- Finally his skeleton was sold to an anatomical museum, and put on display. Yet, in *Death and Mr Pickwick*, this is not quite the last we will hear of Chune....



## March 14



- ▶ Following on from yesterday's post on inset stories: in *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens included a story about the legendary British monarch Bladud, the founder of the city of Bath, who was reduced to being a swineherd, and later attempted to fly. I include my own retelling of Bladud's story in *Death and Mr Pickwick*.



*King Lear in the Rain*

*"May, good my lord, your charity o'ershoots itself."*

- ▶ Bladud was also the father of Shakespeare's King Lear - and here is a Seymour picture from 1830 with his own interpretation of a line from the play, "May, good my lord, your charity o'ershoots itself."

## March 15



- ▶ Yesterday, for breakfast, I went to Gillray's Steakhouse & Bar, on the south bank of the Thames. The Gillray Secret Cure Bacon and Thyme-grilled Tomatoes are highly recommended.



- Gillray's takes its name, of course, from, the great cartoonist James Gillray, who appears as a character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Some of his cartoons are on the restaurant's walls.



- ▶ Though a wonderful artist, towards the end of his life Gillray went insane. The story goes that he tried to commit suicide by jumping out of a window, but his head got caught in the window's metal bars - and Gillray cried out for butter, to use as grease to free his head, so he could slip through, and dash himself on the cobbles in the street below. I think Gillray himself, in one of his grimly humorous moods, would have approved of my taking a photograph of some butter, in the restaurant that bears his name.

## March 16



- The writer Walter Besant has a memorial at Victoria Embankment in London, which Elaine and I visited over the weekend. Besant appears as a character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*, because he played two important roles in the history of *The Pickwick Papers*.



- Firstly, in 1857, when Besant was a student at Christ's College Cambridge, the poet C S Calverley - shown bearded here, though this appears to be a facial adornment of his later years - then a Junior Fellow at the college, decided to set an examination to rigorously test knowledge of *Pickwick*, which was by then the most popular book in the language. Besant finished in first place in the exam.



- Some years later, Besant collaborated with his friend James Rice (shown seated in the portrait) on the short story *The Death of Samuel Pickwick*, which imagines that unimaginable event: the immortal Mr Pickwick succumbing to mortality. Both the examination, and the writing of the story, are featured in *Death and Mr Pickwick*.





- And this is the etymologist Walter Skeat who, as a younger man, finished as runner-up to Besant in the *Pickwick* examination.

## March 17



- Yesterday, I exchanged emails with Gonalo Lian of the Mr Pickwick restaurant in  vora, Portugal. Here is the restaurant's statue of Mr Pickwick as a waiter.



- ▶ Portugal, indeed, gets several mentions in *Death and Mr Pickwick* - most notably in a section about the playwright Samuel Beazley, whose play *The Boarding House* was an influence on the speech of Sam Weller. Beazley claimed to have fought in the Peninsular War - though whether he really did is open to question. He even claimed to have been carted away from the battlefield as a 'corpse', and woke up on a mortuary slab in Lisbon, to the great amazement of a mortuary assistant who was preparing Beazley's body for a shroud.



- I am also reminded of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa's huge enthusiasm for *The Pickwick Papers*. The book was Pessoa's constant companion, and he made one of the greatest quotes about *Pickwick*, which I have often thought about: "One of my life's greatest tragedies is to have already read *The Pickwick Papers* - I can't go back and read it for the first time."

## March 18



- ▶ Not far from Charing Cross in London is Villiers Street, named after the aristocratic Villiers family. In tracing Robert Seymour's descent into suicide, one member of this family, the Right Hon. George Villiers, Earl of Jersey, plays an interesting role.



- Seymour had been commissioned to produce a series of drawings of wealthy racegoers and hunters for the *New Sporting Magazine*. Typically, he would draw roman-nosed dukes, earls and a selection of the top-hatted and cane-bearing posed before the Jockery Club rooms at Newmarket, or the Royal Stand at Ascot. He did these pictures anonymously. Sometimes, the accompanying text would allude to the artist as 'Our invisible friend S' and occasionally there would be an 'RS' monogram in the corner of a picture - but many drawings appeared without any identification of the artist at all. Presumably, Seymour did not wish to be too closely associated with wealthy establishment figures, as this could have undermined his role as the most prolific political cartoonist of the era. The magazine often praised the artist's work, and his great ability to capture a likeness - except on one occasion, when Seymour drew George Villiers.



- The editor commented that the artist had "scarcely done justice to the smart and gallant bearing of the noble Earl" and suggested that Seymour had perhaps caught the Earl "on an unlucky day". This was the last picture that Seymour drew for the magazine - and not long afterwards, he shot himself. The troubles playing on Seymour's mind - probably the result of his involvement with Dickens - had even undermined his ability to draw.

## March 19



- ▶ The other day, Alex Ioanides - who has edited works on the boxer Daniel Mendoza (see Alex's website <http://www.romevillemedia.co.uk/> where copies of the works may be purchased ) sent me a photo after he had visited Pierce Egan's grave in Highgate West Cemetery. The headstone is missing, but the location of the plot is marked in the photo. Fortunately, the stone's epitaph was recorded by a visitor in 1872:
- ▶ *Sacred to the Memory of Pierce Egan  
Author of Several Popular Works  
Who died on 3rd August 1849  
Requiescat in Pace*



## March 20



- ▶ The writer Gilbert à Beckett (1811-1856) is another important character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*...



- ▶ A Beckett went to Westminster School - and was a shy, mousy pupil, who suffered terribly at the hands of bullies. Indeed, at this time, the school was notorious for bullying those who did not fit in - and undoubtedly even the boy's unusual surname set him apart from the rest.



- Gilbert's emotionally distant father, who was obsessed with researches in genealogy - tracing the family's connection to Thomas à Beckett - refused to come to his son's aid, believing that Gilbert would be all the stronger if he endured the suffering.



- The result was that, in adulthood, Gilbert à Beckett became a bully himself - and his main victim was Robert Seymour. A Beckett did not use physical force, though. Instead, he employed the columns of the magazine he edited, *Figaro in London*, to launch vicious written attacks on Seymour, in an attempt to ruin the artist's career.

## March 21



- ▶ When I was killing time before my meal at Gillray's (see post for March 15) I went for a coffee beside the Thames. There was a statue in the public garden nearby, and although I did not know who it represented, and I couldn't see the dedication, I just had a weird feeling that it would be connected to *Death and Mr Pickwick* in some way. And it was! The statue was of Scotland's national poet Robert Burns. He gets a mention in a section of the novel concerned with "originals" for Pickwickian characters.



- ▶ In the heyday of *Pickwick*, many people were thought to be the inspirations for characters in Dickens's novel, though whether they really were is open to question. One supposed original was Alexander Snodgrass, a Scotsman who settled in Bath and became landlord of the Caledonian tavern. He was regarded by some as the original of *Pickwick's* Mr Snodgrass, not only because of his name, but because he composed songs, and on Burns night, shortly after a guest had recited to a *Louse*, he would recite a verse of his own:
- ▶ *A day among all others in the year  
We meet to celebrate a poet dear  
Do make it convenient if you can  
To spend an hour or two wi' Burns the man.*

## March 22



- The third artist to work on *The Pickwick Papers*, Hablot Browne, is commemorated by a plaque at 239 Ladbrooke Grove in London.



- ▶ Although Browne was known for signing his pictures as "Pht" - as in the picture here showing the first meeting between Mr Pickwick and Sam Weller - the picture is actually a later reprint. Originally, Browne chose the pseudonym H E in D , Latin for "No one", for his signature on his first two Pickwick pictures, and it should be noted that there are dots between the letters, indicating that the name is actually an acronym. The meaning of this acronym is a complete mystery: I have spoken to Browne's descendant, Valerie Browne Lester (author of the excellent book *Pht: The Man Who Drew Dickens*) about this, and she has devoted a lot of time to trying to work out the hidden meaning, but to no avail. In *Death and Mr Pickwick*, I suggest a meaning, but this is a mystery which in all likelihood will never be solved.



## March 23



- ▶ Yesterday, I had an excellent Sunday lunch at The Duke's Head in Wokingham - another pub whose sign features the "Wellington Boot" cartoon, by William Heath, the military fantasist who appears as a character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. As I have mentioned previously, Heath started *The Glasgow Looking Glass*, arguably the world's first comic book. This publication was based upon a simple premise - so simple, that it seems strange that nobody had thought of it before: why not put multiple pictures on a page, rather than one?



- ▶ Heath's partner in *The Glasgow Looking Glass* was Thomas Hopkirk, a botanist who owned the only lithographic press in Glasgow. Hopkirk was fascinated by botanical mutations - for instance, plants that had more petals than usual, or flattened roots, or were a strange colour. It is tempting to think that Hopkirk might have conceived of *The Glasgow Looking Glass* as a mutation, in which multiple pictures appeared on a page, rather than one.

## March 24



- ▶ This peculiarly dark painting has particular significance in Robert Seymour's 'countdown' to suicide. It shows the wood engraver John Jackson at work. It was to Jackson that Seymour delivered his last finished drawing, *The Lord of Royston* (see post for February 24) for engraving, on the night before the suicide. One can imagine Seymour placing the drawing on that very workbench, and the emotion of that moment, as he realises that he will never draw another picture.



- ▶ Moreover, the painting is believed to be the work of the man who temporarily replaced Seymour as the *Pickwick* artist, Robert Buss.



- ▶ Also, the workbench is the place where the wrapper design for *The Pickwick Papers* was engraved, by Jackson's brother *Mason*. (Although signed by John Jackson.)

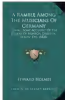
## March 25



- Seymour's brother-in-law Edward Holmes (who was also Seymour's first cousin) is an important character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Holmes was one of the most eminent British music critics of the nineteenth century, known especially for his book *The Life of Mozart*. He is depicted in this painting alongside members of the famous musical Novello family, but unfortunately there is no key to the line-up, and so one cannot identify Holmes with certainty, though he would be one of the younger men present.



- ▶ Although a deeply cultured man, with a profound knowledge of music, Holmes also had an unpleasant character trait - he was known for finding deformity amusing. In *Death and Mr Pickwick*, Holmes presents Seymour with a copy of Shakespeare's complete works as a wedding present, and signs it with a quotation from *Richard III* - "Was ever woman in this humour wooed? Was ever woman in this humour won?" - and on the eve of Richard III's reburial in 2015, it seems appropriate to mention the deformed king in this post. (Shown here portrayed by Antony Sher.)



- ▶ In 1828, Holmes wrote a book *A Ramble among the Musicians of Germany*, and although superficially a work on the history of music, it is also rather Pickwickian, as Holmes records amusing anecdotes and incidents on his travels around Germany, even when these have nothing whatsoever to do with music. It is tempting to think that this work was in Seymour's mind when he conceived of sending Mr Pickwick on his travels around England.



## March 26



- ▶ Before *Pickwick* appeared in serial parts, the king of serial publication was a certain Thomas Kelly, who employed a team of door-to-door salesmen to sell novels and other works in illustrated parts. He was almost certainly the most successful publisher of fiction in England - and, although based in Paternoster Row in London, he sold his works almost exclusively in the north and midlands.
- ▶ It seem that publishers in the south did not find his selling methods 'respectable' - knocking on doors, and disturbing the peace of families in their homes, was not quite the done thing. And indeed, Kelly himself suddenly felt the need for respectability - just before *Pickwick* appeared, he sought the post of Lord Mayor of London, and when he attained that office, he soon closed down his publishing business.



- ▶ One person in the south who would have seen abundant evidence of the success of serialisations was Robert Seymour, who worked for the publishing house of Knight & Lacey, located just a few doors away from Kelly's firm. When Kelly published a serialised account of a notorious crime, the so-called Murder in the Red Barn, Knight & Lacey decided to publish a novelised version of the same crime in serial parts, and although they did not use door-to-door salesmen, they employed Seymour to illustrate the novel - and sales were huge. This success, and the gap in the market from Kelly's impending retirement, probably suggested to Seymour that something else in illustrated serial parts - namely *Pickwick* - could also do very well indeed.



## March 27



- ▶ Another mayoral character in the *Death and Mr Pickwick* is Eleazer Pickwick, who became Mayor of Bath, and whose family name was given to Samuel Pickwick in *The Pickwick Papers*.



- Eleazer started a coaching business, which operated from the White Hart Inn in Bath, and this went on to become the most successful coaching company in the West of England. However, the White Hart's fate might have been very different. The inn was attacked by a mob in 1831 - a spillover from the Bristol Riots - and might well have been burnt down, had it not been stoutly defended by the staff, who kept rioters at bay with red-hot pokers.



- The Bristol riots were started by the appearance of Sir Charles Wetherell - a fierce opponent of constitutional reform - in the city, and terrible scenes of devastation, conflagration and anarchy, with loss of life, were the result.



- ▶ A couple of months later, Robert Seymour portrayed leading members of the government as pantomime characters, in the magazine *Figaro* in London. In particular, he portrayed Wetherell as a clown. Note the burning buildings of Bristol in the background. And note too the fish that protrude from Wetherell's clown-pocket, suggesting the stink of scandal. The demand for this issue of *Figaro* in London was HUGE.

## March 28



- ▶ Although the White Hart was demolished in 1867, another pub run by the Pickwick family survives to this day: the Hare and Hounds, in the village actually called Pickwick, about ten miles outside Bath. This was the first horse-changing point for Pickwick coaches leaving the White Hart for London. The Pickwick family in fact takes its name from the village: the first Pickwick was a foundling, discovered by the roadside at Pickwick village in 1694. As was the practice in those days, a foundling was often called after the place where he or she was discovered.



March 29



- ▶ As publication approaches...here are the front endpapers for the British edition of *Death and Mr Pickwick*.

► And here are the back endpapers.



## March 30



- ▶ In the 1836 advertising prospectus for *The Pickwick Papers*, it was stated that the Pickwick Club was "renowned in the annals of Huggin Lane". Huggin Lane was a short passage connecting Gutter Lane to Wood Street, close to Cheapside in London. The prospectus almost certainly implied that the club members got drunk in the Goldsmith's Arms, a public house on the corner that Huggin Lane shared with Gutter Lane.



- There is nothing there any longer, for Huggin Lane was destroyed in a German bombing raid in the Second World War. However, here I am, on the spot where the pub once stood.

## March 31



- ▶ On Saturday night, Elaine and I had a great evening visiting pubs in central London with historic boxing enthusiasts Alex Joanides and his friends Matt Hookings, Stephen Gallagher and John Warren.
- ▶ The conversation soon turned to talk of Jem Belcher, Frosty Faced Fogo, Pierce Egan and others associated with bareknuckle boxing in the early nineteenth century, as featured in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. This first photo was taken in the Old Bell Tavern in Fleet Street.



- The doorstep of Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese pub.



- The statue of Dr Johnson's cat Hodge. (Dr Johnson appears as a character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*.)



- This photo, taken close to the Citty of Yorke pub, shows the place where there was once the forecourt to the Castle Tavern, where the Daffy Club met. I have mentioned the Daffy Club in previous posts. The club plays a crucial role in *Death and Mr Pickwick*, and the Castle Tavern may be considered a forerunner to the modern-day sports bar.





- The last picture shows where the Castle Tavern once stood - roughly in the location of the light building in the background.

## April 1



- ▶ This is Canonbury Tower in Islington, where Seymour lived for a while, before he became a cartoonist. It was in the Tower that he pursued the goal of 'high art', seeking to become an oil painter. In Seymour's time, the Tower was covered in ivy, and visitors would often climb to the top, for one of the best views in London.



- The Tower had a shifting population of residents, often writers, artists and other seekers of fame. Indeed, the American writer Washington Irving, author of *Rip Van Winkle*, lived in the Tower briefly, and he appears as a character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*.



- And nearby is a pub called The Canonbury, where I enjoyed a burger!

## April 2



- In London at the moment, you will find many statues featuring the Aardman Animations character Shaun the Sheep kitted out in different ways. In a modern-day section of *Death and Mr Pickwick*, there is a mention of Aardman...



- ...and in particular the Wallace and Gromit story *The Wrong Trousers*, in which Wallace walks with the aid of robotic legs.



- But Robert Seymour got there first! This is his picture *Locomotion* from c. 1830, showing a Mr Pickwick-esque character with a steam-powered gait.

## April 3

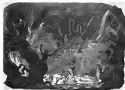


- At 103 Great Portland Street in London is a plaque commemorating Carl Maria von Weber, composer of the opera *Der Freischütz*, who died at this location in 1826.





- ▶ Robert Seymour fell under the spell of Weber, and he produced a large oil painting inspired by *Der Freischütz* and other Germanic myths, which unfortunately is now lost.



DER FREISCHÜTZ

- ▶ However, a woodcut of *Der Freischütz* by Seymour survives in the collection of gothic horror stories *Legends of Terror and Tales of the Wonderful and Wild*. The woodcut is a bit crude - Seymour often complained that woodcutters ruined his work - but it gives us a hint of what Seymour's painting might have been like. It is particularly interesting that *Der Freischütz* could be considered Seymour's earliest interpretation of the incompetent sportsmen theme, which re-emerges in the form of Mr Wrinkle in *The Pickwick Papers* - because in *Der Freischütz* a poor marksman casts magic bullets, which always hit their target. This story is based upon a legend from Bohemia, and in *Death and Mr Pickwick* I turn the legend into a supernatural interpolated episode, in the manner of *The Pickwick Papers*.

# April 4



- ▶ Here is the first published interview with me, from our local magazine *The Windsor*. It's not a hundred per cent accurate, as the interviewer had not read all of *Death and Mr Pickwick* prior to the interview, and also he used some content from Wikipedia (which isn't correct), but overall I think it's a good piece. You can read it online here:
- ▶ <http://edition.pagesuite-professional.co.uk/launch.aspx?eid=7cf3da36-d842-45ca-86ee-46acf810c0d0>

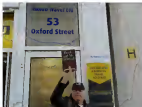
## April 5



- ▶ The cartoonist and pornographer Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827) exerted a great influence on visual culture in the pre-*Pickwick* era.



- At the start of *Death and Mr Pickwick*, Rowlandson is shown guzzling beer in a pub in London, *The Man Loaded with Mischief*.



- The pub no longer exists, but here I am at the site where it once stood, at 53 Oxford Street. It is in this pub that Rowlandson first discusses his recent creation, Doctor Syntax.



- Syntax was the world's first cartoon character, in the sense of being a recognisable figure, who appears in a series of adventures. The recognisability is crucial - prior to Syntax, the only recognisable figures in cartoons were politicians and royalty, who of course were not invented characters. The recognisability would later be a crucial factor in the success of Mr Pickwick and Sam Weller. It made Mr Pickwick and Sam seem real, and unique, and they provoked great affection in viewers - they were not just anonymous figures on a throwaway page.

## April 6



- ▶ Following on from yesterday's post...in *Death and Mr Pickwick* Thomas Rowlandson is shown handing the drawing of the drunkard Dr Drainbarrel to a print publisher in Fleet Street, before going home to his room at the top of 1 James Street, London.





- The original building no longer exists, but here I am at the location.



- The theme of the drunkard in a wheelbarrow was taken up by Robert Seymour in his series *Sketches by Seymour*.



- Phiz also took up the theme in his drawing "Mr Pickwick in the Pound" for *The Pickwick Papers*. Taken together, the three drawings show how *The Pickwick Papers* emerged from traditions of London caricature.

## April 7



- I have come to realise that people not only re-read *The Pickwick Papers*, they RE-re-read it - and the "re-" is capable of many further iterations. British comedian Eric Morecambe for instance would read *Pickwick* on trains when he travelled from theatre to theatre.



- Science fiction writer Isaac Asimov stated that he had read *Pickwick* twenty-six times.



- ▶ Online estimates for the number of times literary critic Harold Bloom has read *Pickwick* vary between fifty and a hundred.
- ▶ Why does *Pickwick* have this peculiar re-readability? I think it has something to do with trying to make the vast journey of *The Pickwick Papers* add up to something. In *Death and Mr Pickwick*, the narrator says towards the end: "It is the lie of novels to pretend that life has a plot. The truth of life is in *Pickwick*: that one thing just follows another. We may strive to find pattern and meaning in *The Pickwick Papers*, and sometimes we find it, but never do we succeed to our complete satisfaction; thus, we read the book again from the first page to the last, in our search for the meaningful whole."

## April 8



- ▶ Elaine recently snapped me outside BBC Broadcasting House because my interest in *The Pickwick Papers* started when the British comedian Griff Rhys Jones chose *Pickwick* as his book to take to a hypothetical desert island in the long-running BBC radio show *Desert Island Discs*.



- ▶ Looking through the show's archive, you can see other celebrities who chose to take *Pickwick* to a desert island - including Peter Sellers.





- ▶ Harry Secombe (who famously played Mr Pickwick on stage) also chose *Pickwick*.



- And so did Timothy Spall. The photo here shows Spall in the role of J.M.W. Turner from the recent biopic *Mr. Turner*, and this links to the subject of illustration: when Sir Walter Scott's poem *The Lady of the Lake* appeared in illustrated form, with pictures by Turner, it became the biggest-selling poem in history, with vast sales. Was this just a "Turner effect"? No. I shall return to this subject tomorrow.

## April 9



- In the early nineteenth century, publishers found again and again that pictures could vastly magnify sales. It didn't even require many pictures for the effect to occur: an illustrated edition of Scott's novels was published, in which each novel had just two pictures, and those two were both at the start - a frontispiece and a title-page - yet so powerful were those two pictures in stimulating sales that many people bought the novels because of the pictures. Of particular significance in this era was an illustrated journal called *The Penny Magazine*, which sold in huge quantities.



- The Penny Magazine published "safe" pictures - often showing animals and architecture - and steered away from anything controversial. So there was no politics, religion or fiction in its pages.



- Seymour denounced this magazine as producing 'Twaddle' in his picture *The Potent Penny Knowledge Mill*. Here, from one pipe flow pennies for the publishers, while from the other pipe flows 'twaddle' for the public. But what is particularly interesting, from the point of view of the creation of *The Pickwick Papers*, is that *The Penny Magazine* was published by The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (or the SDUK). The stated objective of the Society was to 'enlarge the reader's range of observation and to add to his store of facts'. And, at the start of *The Pickwick Papers*, Mr Pickwick's mission is to 'enlarge his sphere of observation, to the advancement of knowledge, and the diffusion of learning.'



- ▶ Mr Pickwick's mission is so similar to that of the SDUK, that it suggests that the purpose of *The Pickwick Papers* is to ridicule *The Penny Magazine*. But also, *The Pickwick Papers* used the same technique as *The Penny Magazine* in creating a market - the use of illustrations. For *The Pickwick Papers* was almost certainly the most heavily-illustrated work of fiction which had appeared up to that point in history, with over 40 pictures accompanying the text. Any analysis of *The Pickwick Papers*' colossal success must surely take into account its use of pictures. Dickens's writing was not the only reason for *Pickwick*'s success.

## April 10



- ▶ Yesterday, I mentioned *The Penny Magazine*, whose contents - such as bland images of animals - were denounced by Robert Seymour as 'twaddle'.



- These images were selected by the magazine's publisher, Charles Knight, as part of a moral campaign against the lurid pictures which often appeared in other publications.





- For instance, the picture here, showing a beheading. Elements of the public's love of the lurid survive in *The Pickwick Papers* in the inset stories, such as the tale of *The Madman's Manuscript*, in which a madman imagines slashing his wife's throat with a razor.

## April 11



- The other day, I met Peter Stadlera for the first time. This was in the Exmouth Arms, at 23 Exmouth Market, London. After a pulled pork burger, topped with crispy bacon, washed down with a chocolate orange ale (in my case), and cider (in Peter's), we took advantage of the Exmouth Arms' location - that it is near four sites of great significance to *Death* and *Mr Pickwick*, which I shall post about over the next few days.



- ▶ Just down the street, at 70 Exmouth Market, is the location of an old pub, long gone, called The London Spa Tavern. In *Death and Mr Pickwick*, I have Seymour making sketches in this tavern, at the time when he was fascinated by Germanic legends, such as *Der Freischütz*.



► The London Spa Tavern.



THE SPECTRE BRIDE.

- An example of Seymour's art of this time is the rather crude woodcut *The Spectre Bride*, for the book *Legends of Terror and Tales of the Wild and Wonderful*.

# April 12



SleuthSayers: Death and Mr Pickwick

2015/04/12/04

- ▶ An article about *Death and Mr Pickwick*, written by me, has just been published at:
- ▶ <http://www.sleuthsayers.org/2015/04/death-and-mr-pickwick24.html>

## April 13



- ▶ Continuing my meeting with Peter Stadiera, in the area of the Exmouth Arms in Islington...
- ▶ Robert Seymour lived two doors away from the London Spa Tavern (see post for April 11) on Rosoman Street, and so roughly in the area of the door shown here.



- ▶ The interesting thing about Rosoman Street, though, is that in the nineteenth century it was spelt in various ways - not just Rosoman, but also Rosomon, Rosamund, Rosemond or Rosomans. As you will discover in *Death and Mr Pickwick*, Seymour's tragedy is connected to his inability to spell - and it is tempting to think that he would feel at home on a street associated with such erratic spelling. Seymour's inability to spell is demonstrated by this flier advertising his artistic skills. As you can see, he has even misspelt his own name.



# April 13



Death and Mr Pickwick

Charles Dickens

- ▶ Announcing...a new channel on youtube where, from time to time, I will post short videos about *Death and Mr Pickwick*. The first video, *The Mystery of Robert Seymour*, is already available. Here is the link:
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKD45EJb008-bE0YRTc6wrg>

April 14



- ▶ Let's go back to the area of the Exmouth Arms pub in Islington. A little way down the street from the pub, at 56 Exmouth Market, is a plaque at the house where the great clown Joseph Grimaldi lived.





► And here is Grimaldi.



- ▶ And this is Grimaldi's son, J.S. Grimaldi. Both appear as characters in *Death and Mr Pickwick*.
- ▶ J.S. Grimaldi was an alcoholic, and he experienced terrible hallucinations. His drinking habits were undoubtedly related to his feelings of inadequacy - for although he was a good clown, he could never be as good as his father. J.S. Grimaldi died young, and on his deathbed he insisted on wearing his clown's outfit, believing himself to be performing on stage, even as he exhaled his last breath. J.S. Grimaldi's tragedy inspired *The Stroller's Tale* in *The Pickwick Papers*, which Dickens imposed on the *Pickwick* project, against the wishes of Seymour. The resulting struggle between artist and writer ultimately led to Seymour raising a gun to his heart.

## April 15



- As the last stage of my trip with Peter Stadlera, we went to see the plaque at 71 Amwell Street in honour of the artist George Cruikshank.





- Cruikshank, who appears as a character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*, was at one time the most acclaimed illustrator in London, and Seymour merely the young pretender.

## The March of Intellect



- ▶ However, shortly before Seymour's death, *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* stated: "Seymour seems to be beating Cruikshank out of the field."
- ▶ In the early part of his career, when Seymour produced such works as *The March of Intellect*, he adopted the name "Shortshanks" as a pseudonym, and at first sight, this appears to be a nod to Cruikshank's talent...



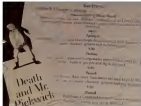
- ▶ But Shortshanks also reminds one of the nickname of King Edward the First, Longshanks - especially as the pseudonym is ShortshankS, with an extra "S", rather than Shortshank.
- ▶ Edward the First was known as "The Hammer of the Scots", but his son, who later became Edward the Second (shown here) by virtue of his junior status as Prince, might be considered a smaller version of the King, or Shortshanks.
- ▶ Edward the Second was the most famous gay man in English history. Was Seymour playing a coded game here - apparently honouring Cruikshank's talent, but actually signalling something about himself?



## April 16



- This church is St Mary's, Putney, which Seymour depicted on the wrapper of *The Pickwick Papers*.



- I have Seymour going to the Star and Garter pub nearby immediately after sketching the church...and I did the same after Elaine snapped the church's pic. And I have to say the modern-day pub serves a FANTASTIC selection of charcuterie and cheese boards.



- We chose the Spanish board, because it included Manchego cheese - which of course comes from Spain's La Mancha region, which in turn can be associated with the character who was a great influence on *Pickwick*, the *Man of La Mancha*, Don Quixote.



- All the eating and drinking in pubs in *The Pickwick Papers* produced a trail of hostelryes that readers could visit for themselves - and I definitely want to lay down a counterpart trail for readers of *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Check out the Star and Garter website at:

<http://www.thestarandgarter.com>

# April 17



- I mentioned yesterday that Seymour drew St Mary's, Putney on the wrapper of *Pickwick* – it is the church in the background at the bottom, identified by its proximity to Putney Bridge. But let's also consider the frame that appears on that wrapper...





- It is remarkably similar to the frame for *Rational Recreations*, published by Knight and Lacey in 1824. This drawing is unsigned, but Seymour was known to have been employed by the company, and given the similarity to the *Pickwick* frame, it is almost certainly his work - suggesting that in *Pickwick* he was drawing on memories of earlier compositions. But we can go back further in time, to Seymour's boyhood...



- Seymour received only the very limited education his mother gave him at home. I looked for books and primers that she could have used to teach her son - and I came across *Chinnery's Writing and Drawing Made Easy*. One cannot say for sure that *Chinnery* was used to teach the young Seymour, but the frame of the image referring to "G is for Grasshopper" (shown left) looks like an early prototype of the *Pickwick* frame - compare the knotting together of agricultural tools to the knotting of guns and fishing rods on *Pickwick's* wrapper.

## April 17



- ▶ Here is Simon Carmio, the husband of my cousin Sylvia, with an advance copy of *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Sylvia and Simon live in the Netherlands.



April 18



- Here I am, at the Hammersmith Ram, doing Pickwickian research on the pub's absolutely delicious Somerset brie and cranberry stuffed chicken breast wrapped in bacon, with Savoy cabbage and Aspath's cider gravy...



- The pub has a number of old cartoons on the walls, including this one by Seymour. In the background, in one of the posters, Seymour announces his resignation from the magazine *Figaro* in London.





- And here is Mr Pickwick looking at a copy of *London Drinker*, the magazine of the Campaign for Real Ale, which we happened to find in the Ram, and which also just happens to mention the imminent publication of a certain novel...

# April 19



- ▶ The series *Poldark* featuring Aidan Turner, which Elaine loves to watch - can't think why - moves towards its conclusion tonight on BBC 1. The series is partly filmed in Corsham, and this town appears in *Death and Mr Pickwick*.





- ▶ In Seymour's time, the art gallery at Corsham House (now known as Corsham Court) was regarded as the second finest public art collection in the country - the gallery was STUFFED with old masters. It has to be admitted that, today, the collection is not what it was, and many fine paintings have been sold over the years, but the gallery is still definitely worth a visit. In *Death and Mr Pickwick*, Seymour goes to the gallery as a result of his ambition to become an oil painter - the 'high art' of Corsham represented exactly the sort of works he needed to study, for Seymour had no professional training, and could only succeed by learning from the masters.



- But of particular interest is the coaching stop that was used by people coming from London to visit the gallery. It was in the village of... Pickwick. It was actually at the Hare and Hounds pub run by... Moses Pickwick. (I featured the pub in the post of March 28.) In Seymour's time, the name "Pickwick" was well-known in artistic circles. As far as I am aware, this has never been pointed out before, in all the vast literature on *The Pickwick Papers*. It is an example of how, by taking a non-academic path, and by writing a NOVEL about historical events, one discovers things which academics have missed.

## April 20



- ▶ 179 years ago, on April 20 1836, at about the time of day I am writing these words, Robert Seymour raised his fowling gun to his chest, and shot himself through the heart. So began the train of events that led towards *Death and Mr Pickwick*.
- ▶ I decided to mark this day by three pictures. The first is a portrait of Seymour by the engraver Weld Taylor, who appears as a character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Taylor admitted that he added Seymour's smile to the drawing, for Seymour was unsmiling throughout their session together.



- The second picture is by Seymour, his suicide-themed *Better Luck Next Time*. People who eventually kill themselves often give indications and hints of their grim fate.





- ▶ The third picture is one of Seymour's strangest, *There is no such man, it is impossible*, inspired by a line from *Othello*. This is from Seymour's serially-issued collection of over 200 lithographs, *New Readings of Old Authors*, each giving an unusual interpretation of a quotation from Shakespeare or Byron. Seymour drew many fat bellies, but the one he draws in this picture is surely one of the largest human bellies in pendulous existence. The *New Readings* series was a great success, and one reviewer remarked: "Shakespeare is here travestied with a felicity that would have added laurels to the comic genius of a Hogarth."

## April 21



- ▶ If it's Tuesday, this must be Belgium...
- ▶ Last week, my wife Elaine was in Brussels on a work trip, and this was a golden opportunity for her to go to that city's Pickwick pub, and send back photos for the facebook page. Alas, she had to work later than expected, and so did not have the time to go inside the pub. Still, she managed to snap the pub's exterior from her cab.



- And to add a little more of a *Pickwickian* flavour, here are three other photos she took on that trip. First, the statue of the poet John Betjeman near the Eurostar terminal. Betjeman was an admirer of *Pickwick*, and also famously made a comparison between the novel and the British TV soap opera *Coronation Street*.



- Second, a Pickwick teabag.



- And now Mr Pickwick meets the Manneken Pis. From time to time Belgium's most famous statue is dressed in outfits - and there is a museum nearby, showing all the previous identities of the Manneken, including Elvis Presley. One day, will the little man wear Mr Pickwick's jacket, tights, gaiters and spectacles?

## April 22



- ▶ Robert Buss, the immediate replacement for Seymour as the Pickwick artist, was known to have written an account of his involvement with Pickwick in a notebook, but this was apparently lost. My efforts to find the notebook came to nothing until, in a scrapbook of newspaper clippings in the Dickens Museum, I found a cutting which named the collector who had acquired the notebook. It was then a simple matter to trace the notebook to the Huntington Library in California, which I visited in 2007. In a margin of the notebook, it named the engraver to whom Buss had passed his Pickwick drawings in a desperate attempt to get the etchings completed. The engraver was George Adcock. I believe this is the first time this knowledge has been made public. Adcock had previously done engravings of paintings by Buss, and here is one.



- And here is another Adcock engraving of a painting by Buss.



- An Adcock engraving showing Falstaff.





- One more Adcock engraving - *Dancing the Tarantella*.

# April 23



- ▶ I was recently in touch with Margaret Haley, the proprietor of the charming shop Mrs. Pickwick's, in Horbury, Wakefield. The shop, set in a sixteenth-century building, with the original oak beams, deals in ladies' and gents' underwear, hosiery, needlework, and suchlike - for a fuller description go to: <http://www.horburyvillage.com/shops.../Mrs.%20Pickwick's.html> "I was originally undecided as to what I should name the shop," said Margaret. "Knowing that Mr Pickwick had no wife, but he did have a mother, I thought that Mrs Pickwick's would be a good name."



- And actually, if you go to Philz's original frontispiece for *The Pickwick Papers* you can JUST make out a bespectacled lady in a portrait who, in all likelihood, is Samuel Pickwick's mother.



April 24



- Following on from yesterday's post - Mr Pickwick of course never married, but there was the little imbroglio with his landlady Mrs Bardell, who believed he was proposing, when he was actually referring to the appointment of Sam Weller as his manservant. The resulting confusion led to Mr Pickwick being sued for breach of promise, and the court-case, *Bardell V Pickwick*, has sometimes been called the most famous fictional trial in the English language. Not so widely known, though, is that some of the trial is based upon a real trial, in which the Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, was sued for adultery - or "Criminal Conversation" as adultery was known in those days. (Often shortened to "Crim. Con.")



- It was alleged that Melbourne had had an affair with the poetess Caroline Norton - and a young Charles Dickens reported on the trial for *The Morning Chronicle*. In the nineteenth century, Crim. Con. cases were a source of titillating entertainment, and people flocked to such trials in the hope of hearing bedroom secrets revealed. One can imagine the electric possibility, for those in the court, of hearing the Prime Minister described with his breeches around his ankles! I read through Dickens's agonisingly long report - twenty-five columns of microscopic type - and although the trial was never the scandalous event that attendees would have liked, the counsel for the plaintiff did make a number of references to Mrs Norton's taking a fresh handkerchief whenever Lord Melbourne paid a visit. One can imagine the smirks and knowing nods in the chamber as imaginations considered the likely use of these handkerchiefs.

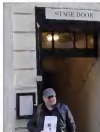
April 25



Here I am, conducting extensive Pickwickian research in The Porterhouse Brewing Co. public house, in Maiden Lane, Covent Garden...



- In Dickens's time, this pub was known as the Cider Cellars (sometimes spelt Cyder, and sometimes Cellar, singular) - and one can still go downstairs, and experience the subterranean atmosphere which Dickens himself would have known.



- The pub is situated next to the stage-door of the Adelphi Theatre, and Dickens would visit the pub before or after a performance, accompanied by his friend Tom Potter, when both were working as clerks at the legal firm of Ellis and Blackmore.





- ▶ The Cider Cellars feature in *Death and Mr Pickwick*, and I show the young Dickens and Potter listening to the highly disreputable songs which were sung there. Although I normally drink ale, on this occasion, in honour of the pub's past, I drank a pint of the excellent Mortimer's Orchard cider. Do take a look at the pub's website:
- ▶ <http://www.porterhousebrewco.com/>

## April 26



- ▶ March 31 1836 was the publication date of the first serial part of *The Pickwick Papers*. That particular date in the calendar, at the end of the month, was not arbitrary: in Dickens's time, the last day of the month was known as 'Magazine Day', when all the wholesalers of periodicals in London, who were based in Paternoster Row, beside St Paul's Cathedral, distributed copies of publications to booksellers and newsreaders - who would in turn distribute the publications across London, and indeed across the whole of the United Kingdom. There is nothing left of Paternoster Row now - the area was devastated by bombs in the Second World War.



- So if March 31 1836 was the start of The Pickwickian Age - when *The Pickwick Papers* reigned as the most successful novel in the world, and Mr Pickwick became the most famous fictional character in history - when was the end? I would choose August 19 1934. Shortly before that date, there were plans to make a movie of *The Pickwick Papers*, directed by Walter Forde, shown here. But...



- ▶ ...on August 19 1934, there was an article published in the newspaper *Empire News*, which was headed: "What has happened to *Pickwick*?" Forde, and the executives of Gaumont-British Films, had decided to shelve the *Pickwick* project, because the movie was "not considered box-office". Although a movie of *Pickwick* was made in the 1950s, clearly in 1934 the novel was on the slide, and has never recovered. Today, *The Pickwick Papers* is one of Dickens's least-read novels. But could that situation be about to change? I have always considered *The Pickwick Papers* to be a sleeping giant, just needing a little nudge to be roused from deep slumbers....

## April 26



- ▶ Peter Stadlera has found this pic of Sam Vale, who was the 'original' of Sam Weller, in the sense that he was known for using phrases of the "as the so-and-so said" sort.



- And Peter has also posted this pic of the Surrey Theatre, where Sam Vale often performed.



- And Peter Stadlera has posted this picture of a plaque. The miser connected with the legend of Mary Overie was the subject of a play called *The Miser of Southwark Ferry*. And who was in this play? Why, none other than Sam Vale. And who did the illustrations for the play in published form? A certain artist by the name of...Robert Seymour.

April 27



- Here I am at the Sweeney & Todd restaurant in Reading, Berkshire, which, as you would expect, serves truly remarkable pies. (I had the rump steak and stilton pie - but check out the restaurant's website at [www.sweeneyandtodd.co.uk](http://www.sweeneyandtodd.co.uk) for the full menu.) There are some associations between *The Pickwick Papers* and the notorious Demon Barber of Fleet Street...





- ▶ Sweeney Todd made his debut in the story *The String of Pearls*, which was published by Edward Lloyd, shown here. Lloyd built his publishing empire upon the foundations of the enormously successful *Pickwick* plagiarism, *The Penny Pickwick*. But also, *The Pickwick Papers* may well have had an influence upon the content of *The String of Pearls* - the idea of contaminated food appears in two of Sam Weller's gruesome anecdotes. (The tale of the kittens being made into pies and also the tale of the man who committed suicide by turning himself into sausages.) It has to be said, though, that stories about contaminated food had circulated long before *The Pickwick Papers* appeared, and indeed as a child Dickens heard such tales, told to him by his nurse.



- I had originally intended to include more content about Edward Lloyd and other Pickwick plagiarists in *Death and Mr Pickwick*, but the novel is very long as it is, and some things had to be cut, and so I include just a passing mention of Lloyd, when Robert Seymour's son remarks, bitterly, that Lloyd had become a newspaper magnate on the foundations of Robert Seymour's work. However, do check out [www.edwardlloyd.org](http://www.edwardlloyd.org) for more about Lloyd. Also, here is an article about Lloyd on the website of the St Bride Foundation: [https://stbridefoundation.wordpress.com/2016/04/20/the-life-of-edwa...](https://stbridefoundation.wordpress.com/2016/04/20/the-life-of-edwa.../)

April 28



- ▶ The Dickens Tavern, opposite Paddington Station in London, has various pictures of Dickensian characters on its walls, including Dismal Jemmy.





- ▶ Jemmy tells the story of the alcoholic, dying clown in *The Pickwick Papers* and the photo snapped here, showing the picture of Jemmy in situ, is blurred, because of the lighting and reflection from the glass, but, helpfully, it suggests the befuddled mind of the clown. Of particular interest to me, though, was that Dismal Jemmy promised Mr Pickwick a second story, but this story was never told. I saw this as unfinished business, and I definitely wanted to include Dismal Jemmy's untold tale in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. I knew I needed a story which could plausibly have been told by Dickens, and would also be somewhat similar to the tale of the clown, and therefore be in keeping with Jemmy's character...



- Eventually, I stumbled across a local legend, from Cobham in Kent, of a sailor who lived alone in Darnley Mausoleum, and who was turned insane by the experience. This struck me as perfect: the hallucinations of a *crazy* sailor could be a parallel to those of the clown. Moreover, sailors could be associated with grog - one is reminded of the song *What shall we do with the Drunken Sailor?* - and the gloomy atmosphere of a mausoleum, with an ever-present reminder of mortality, would certainly be in keeping with the miserable death of the clown. Above all, the legend came from Cobham - just a short distance from where Dismal Jammy was last seen, in Rochester - and could very plausibly have been known to Dickens. So, I constructed Dismal Jammy's lost tale - and with that, I finally closed the book on *The Pickwick Papers*, after more than 175 years.

## April 29



- ▶ Peter Stadlera has just found this picture of The Golden Cross Inn at Charing Cross, which is mentioned in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. The inn no longer survives, but there were some cobbles from the inn's court, and an arch, which hung around until at least the 1930s, and may possibly survive today. When I am next in that part of London, I shall go in search of them.



- The other picture Peter posts is from *The Book of Christmas*, illustrated by Seymour. One associates the portrayal of Christmas with Dickens...but Seymour was there first!

April 29



- ▶ Here I am outside the hotel & pub The Great Expectations in Reading, Berkshire. The hotel chose its name because Dickens once gave a public reading there. And I have posted this image because I too will soon be giving a public reading, at the Chipping Campden Literature Festival on May 8.
- ▶ This will be the public debut of *Death and Mr Pickwick*. I shall not only read extracts, but will also talk about the book, and there will be a Q & A session afterwards, and a chance to purchase signed copies of the novel.



## April 30



- ▶ This is the White Hart Inn, run by Moses Pickwick. The photo here shows the inn in 1867, shortly before it was demolished. But destruction of the inn by rioters was a real possibility in the wake of the events in Bristol in 1831. In *The Pickwick Papers*, it has often been said that Samuel Pickwick becomes a heroic figure when he goes to prison on a point of principle, and in *Death and Mr Pickwick*, Moses Pickwick becomes a heroic figure too, when he and staff at the White Hart defend the inn against the mob.





- The Bristol Riots, and political reform, led to the founding of the magazine *Figaro in London*, with cartoons by Seymour. On more than one occasion in the magazine, he used the image of a body being dissected, to suggest that chances of real reform were being hacked away by anti-reform politicians.

April 30



- My dream: the UK jacket design for *Death and Mr Pickwick* becomes the most famous spatter since *Watchmen*.



May 1



- Peter Stadlera, who has been reading a proof copy of *Death and Mr Pickwick*, has posted about the illustrated serial publication, *The English Dance of Death*, by Combe and Rowlandson, which I mention in the novel. The idea behind this work is that death, represented pictorially by a skeleton, will come to everyone.



- ▶ Of particular interest is an image showing the death of a clown, accompanied by the verse:
- ▶ *"Behold the signal of Old Time  
That bids you close your  
pantomime!"*



- Combe and Rowlandson were inspired by an earlier work, *The Dance of Death*, by Holbein, which Dickens encountered as a boy.



- In all likelihood, Combe and Rowlandson's work not only influenced the portrayal of the dying clown in *The Pickwick Papers*, but also reminded Dickens of Holbein, because Dickens actually mentions *The Dance of Death* in the text of *The Pickwick Papers*.







- Seymour was almost certainly aware of the *Dance of Death* too - note the images he has drawn for the title-page of an unpublished work *Death in London*. A work, of course, whose title describes his own unhappy end.



## May 2



- ▶ The *Pickwick*-themed cartoons on this and the following pages are taken from the British Cartoon Archive at the University of Kent. That place is of relevance when I consider my childhood, and the things in my background which prepared me for writing *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Let me explain...



A cartoon by David Coverly, the author of the book 'The Book of David'. It shows a man in a dark suit and white shirt, wearing a bow tie, standing in a garden. He is looking at a small, round, white object on the ground. In the background, there is a large, ornate house with a red roof and a chimney. A rainbow is visible in the sky. The cartoon is signed 'Coverly' in the bottom right corner.

- My father had an obsession with making scrapbooks. He died in 1987, but when I showed just how many he had made to a family member, after my mother's death in 2004, it was remarked that he must have been suffering from mental illness. And perhaps he was - if he found an interesting nugget in a newspaper or magazine, or a cartoon story in a children's comic, he would cut it out, and paste it into a scrapbook. He made literally hundreds of these books. So many, that the sheer weight of them was starting to cause subsidence in the backroom where he did his pasting. Although I wish he had done something else with his time, I cannot deny that his behaviour has some connection with my work on *Death and Mr Pickwick*...

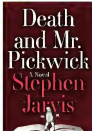


- For one thing, *The Pickwick Papers* itself could be seen as something of a literary scrapbook, in which diverse types of material are gathered together. But also, my research on *Pickwick* involved collecting mountains of information, as I strove to read everything ever written about *The Pickwick Papers*, and obviously this could be seen as obsessive behaviour on my part. And the comics my father bought were obviously laying the groundwork for my interest in an illustrator, namely Robert Seymour...



- ▶ But when my mother died, my brother and I wondered what on earth we could do with these scrapbooks - neither of us were particularly interested in keeping them, and we couldn't imagine anyone else would be interested in them either. We came very close to thinking that we would have to dispose of them all, and simply destroy our father's years of 'work'. However, the fact that so many of the scrapbooks contained cartoons and comic strips meant that the British Cartoon Archive at the University of Kent was prepared to take them off our hands...and they had to use a removal van to do so.

May 2



- ▶ MAJOR NEWS: The American Booksellers Association have made *Death and Mr Pickwick* their #1 pick in their adult fiction "Indies Introduce" list. A review on their website says the following:
- ▶ "DEATH AND MR. PICKWICK by Stephen Jarvis is a rollicking great novel, brimming with vivid characters, that takes the position that perhaps Charles Dickens didn't completely create his first, and arguably greatest, novel. I had a very hard time putting this epic aside to go to work! Truly wonderful!"  
- Bill Carl, Booksellers on Fountain Square (Cincinnati, OH)

May 3



- ▶ Continuing the theme of things in my background which "prepared" me to write *Death and Mr Pickwick*....the question arises as to when I first encountered the 'sad clown' motif, which is so important to the novel. I suspect it was when I was teenager, via Bryan Ferry's 1973 album *These Foolish Things*. I have already mentioned, in a previous post, that this album got me into Bob Dylan, via Ferry's cover of *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall* - and of course, this song has a line about a clown who cried in an alley. But the emotional power of the motif was truly brought home by another song on the album...





- ▶ ...Ferry's cover of Smokey Robinson's *The Tracks of My Tears*.
- ▶ This song drives home the idea that a smile does not necessarily represent happiness, with its lyrics:
- ▶ *So take a good look at my face  
You'll see my smile looks out of place  
if you look closer, it's easy to trace  
The tracks of my tears*
- ▶ So do check out Ferry's performance of that song:
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=021jMz7xGA4>

May 3



- ▶ I would also like to mention another teenage idol of mine, Steve Harley, of the band Cockney Rebel. On the album *The Psychomodo* Harley included a strange song called *Ritz* :
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6JfMJJRW8Q>
- ▶ The lyrics of this are dreamy, and not especially coherent, but they include these lines:
- ▶ Oh! the clown, his stare is eyeless  
Shall he make you laugh or cry, yes
- ▶ Indeed, the song even opens with a line referring to the artist Roualt, who took a special interest in clowns:
- ▶ Mark to Roualt's white poverty  
Clowns in drag concealing vanity
- ▶ So when I read about Seymour shooting himself after drawing a dying clown, songs of my teenage years had probably primed me to find the sad clown motif of considerable interest.

May 3



- ▶ Peter Stadlera, who is reading a proof copy of *Death and Mr Pickwick*, has posted these fantastic images of Holbein's *Dance of Death* - here are the capital letters DEATH (featuring the King, the Cardinal, Bones of all Men, the Boozer, the Bishop) as they might appear in spelling out the title *DEATH and Mr Pickwick*.

May 3



- ...And Peter's lovely cat obviously shares his literary tastes! (Cats actually feature quite prominently in *Death and Mr. Pickwick*.) Peter writes: "Here is our British shorthair cat (nickname Pelzi) and his favourite new novel *Death and Mr. Pickwick* - yes it's Pelzi's approved best reading pleasure, his pick!"

May 4



- More on the events in my life which led me towards writing *Death and Mr Pickwick*...As some of you know, I used to write about unusual leisure activities for *The Daily Telegraph*, and I was also a frequent guest on BBC and Canadian radio, talking about the people I had met, and my unusual experiences. So for instance, I might try out a strange sport, like toe-wrestling...



- ...or competitive snuff-taking (where you have to take fifty sorts of snuff as fast as you possibly can, and if you sneeze, cough or splutter you're disqualified)...



- ..or I might sample the delights of lying on a bed of nails...



- ...or I would meet unusual clubs and societies, like the International Brick Collectors Association...





- ...or the Test Card Circle (whose members are fascinated by television test patterns). All this activity culminated in...



- ...the compilation volumes of my articles, *The Bizarre Leisure Book* and its follow-up, *The Ultimate Guide to Unusual Leisure*.





- Let me say that if I tried out an unusual activity requiring any skill, I was normally utterly incompetent, and performed disastrously. There was, for instance, the time I tried out the flying trapeze...I made a bad launch, was dragged across the ground, attached to a harness, and the friction of the mat pulled down my shorts and underpants, so I was naked on the flying trapeze.



- ▶ However my incompetence didn't matter at all, because disasters would just add humour to my articles. But of course, incompetence at activities is strongly reminiscent of parts of *The Pickwick Papers* - notably the scenes involving Mr Winkle, the incompetent sportsman. Indeed, the whole enterprise of travelling around, and meeting eccentric and unusual people, sounds very Pickwickian, especially as clubs were often at the heart of events.



- Most important of all, in interviewing people, I would seize upon the single line they said which revealed some aspect of their life and personality, and this was a great preparation for characterising people in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. I remember, for instance, interviewing a husband and wife who had a collection of 5,000 bricks, and I asked them why they did it. The husband said: "We haven't got any children - what else can we do?"

May 5



- ▶ Another thing which certainly led me in the direction of writing *Death and Mr Pickwick* was the television show *Big Brother*. Some people may be appalled by this - *Big Brother* has even been called the 'worst TV show in the world' - but I have heard of other writers watching *Big Brother*, because of the insights it gives into human behaviour. I was fascinated by the show from the start.

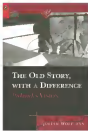


- The first UK series, featuring the villain Nasty Nick, was an extraordinary television experience: when Nick was exposed as a cheat, and in his shame hid himself under a duvet, weeping, I thought it was among the most compelling TV shows I had ever seen. So compelling, that advertising breaks were almost painful to endure.



- Also, I have mentioned previously that my interest in *The Pickwick Papers* began when the comedian Griff Rhys Jones chose *Pickwick* as his book on the BBC radio show *Desert Island Discs* - and Jones's description of *Pickwick* as "so full of life" made me think of *Big Brother*. When I read *Pickwick* for the first time, it struck me that the book could even be seen as a nineteenth-century forerunner of the TV show - both are rambling, plotless things, in which many an episode is fuelled by alcohol. Both too, are concerned with observation of people - Mr Pickwick even describes himself as "an observer of human nature", emphasised by the magnifying glass on his chest.





- Indeed, an academic work published in 2006, *The Old Story with a Difference: Pickwick's Vision* by Julian Wolfreys, noted the abundance of words in *The Pickwick Papers* concerned with eyes, observation and seeing. Furthermore, just as *Pickwick* was the greatest literary phenomenon in history, so too *Big Brother* is one of the most successful TV franchises in history, with versions being made in over 50 countries across the globe. Towards the end of *Death and Mr Pickwick*, in one of the sections set in modern times, I even mention *Big Brother*, as a nod to the influence this show has had upon my writing.

# May 5



Virtual Library of Babel makes Borges's infinite store of books a reality – almost

Jorge Luis Borges's 1941 tale about a library containing every possible combination of letters – every work that could ever be written – has come to life

THEGUARDIAN.COM | BY ALISON FLOOD

- ▶ I wanted to share this link about Borges' story *The Library of Babel*, posted by Michael Sapers:
- ▶ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/may/04/virtual-library-of-babel-makes-borges-infinite-store-of-books-a-reality-almost>
- ▶ Borges is an amazing writer, and I mention him in one of the modern-day sections of *Death and Mr Pickwick*. (Specifically, I refer to his story *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*, about a man who reproduces a section of *Don Quixote* word-for-word, without ever having read the original.) When I wrote the section of *Death and Mr Pickwick* dealing with Mr H, the man who spent fifteen years cataloguing every word of *The Pickwick Papers*, I thought Mr H had something Borgesian about him.

May 5

## BEST SUMMER READS 2015

### Best Summer Books, 2015

The best books of 2015, chosen by Publishers Weekly editors. The best books in fiction, nonfiction, children's literature, science, history, and more.

BEST BOOKS/PUBLISHERS WEEKLY.COM

- ▶ **\*\*\*MAJOR NEWS\*\*\*** *Death and Mr Pickwick* is in the "Best of Summer" fiction list of *Publishers Weekly*, the American book trade journal. This is what they say:
- ▶ *Death and Mr. Pickwick*  
Stephen Jarvis (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)
- ▶ "If you're looking for an immersive Dickensian doorstopper this summer, look no further than Jarvis's rollicking re-creation of Dickens's publication of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*. Jarvis's panoramic perspective of 19th-century London and its vibrant denizens makes for thrilling reading."

May 6



- One more post about the things in my past which acted as a preparation for writing *Death and Mr Pickwick*...I would certainly have to mention American superhero comics, which fascinated me as a boy, and I am sure gave an appeal to writing a novel in which the main character was an illustrator, Robert Seymour, and in which the subject-matter was a novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, which linked image to text.



- I also think it is worthwhile mentioning the creation of Batman...



- The suppression of Seymour's role in the creation of *The Pickwick Papers* is somewhat similar to the suppression of the writer, Bill Finger, in Batman's creation. Only the artist, Bob Kane, shown here, was credited as the creator of the character - but Batman was really a co-creation, with Finger supplying a massive input.



- Indeed, I have just found this website:  
<http://noble mama.blogspot.co.uk/.../kickstarter-to-commemora...>,  
which campaigns for the recognition of Bill Finger.

# May 6



## Robert Seymour

Robert Seymour was an English draughtsman from the early 19th-century although he worked among the great artists and engravers of his time he never ventured fully into the territory for which his success rested on.

LAMBETH COMED BOOK (1738)

- Just before I go to the Chipping Camden Literature Festival, I thought I would share some posts by Peter Stadlara, who is currently reading a proof copy of *Death and Mr Pickwick* - and doing so with enormous, wonderful enthusiasm. First up, is this entry Peter has found about Seymour in an online encyclopedia about comic creators.

[https://www.lambiek.net/artists/s/seymour\\_robert.htm?fb\\_action\\_id=817670446321547&fb\\_action\\_type=og.likes&fb\\_ref=710mTRr\\_0duLike](https://www.lambiek.net/artists/s/seymour_robert.htm?fb_action_id=817670446321547&fb_action_type=og.likes&fb_ref=710mTRr_0duLike) Peter remarks: "Nice article on Robert Seymour with marvellous pictures by this exceptional artist. Great reference to Stephen Jarvis's forthcoming novel *Death and Mr Pickwick*, an absolute must read for everyone interested in Seymour and *The Pickwick Papers*."





#### The Dark Origins Of Clowns

There are clowns out in force stalking children. Clowns are there to you better watch everything you are about them before they come to get you.

CartoonistPHOTO.COM

- ▶ Next, Peter has found this interesting article about clowns which mentions *The Pickwick Papers*:
- ▶ <http://themindcircle.com/the-dark-origins-of-clowns/>





May 9



- ▶ Well, *Death and Mr Pickwick* made its public debut at Chipping Campden Literature Festival. You see me here in St James's Church in the town, where I made a speech...



- ...and here I am enjoying a burger at *Michael's Mediterranean Restaurant* in the centre of the town...



- ▶ ...and also enjoying a chicken in panda sauce at the Eight Belles Inn (note that - no mere chicken panda curry, but a chicken in panda sauce. Clearly, I was at a classy pub.)
- ▶ In my speech, I said that it was astonishing, when you consider the THOUSANDS of books, articles and academic papers written about the life and works of Dickens - often on the most obscure subjects - that so little had been written about Robert Seymour. I suggested that the reason for the neglect may be that Seymour was gay. The print-shops that Seymour ruled were notorious gay-pick up places. Given all the taboos surrounding homosexuality - and of course in Seymour's time being gay was a capital offence - it may be that Dickensians did not want to associate Dickens, and the largely male cast of The Pickwick Papers, with a gay man, and this has led to the neglect of Seymour.

# May 9



## Looking to unlock artist's secrets

A lost-Deedbox containing a missing manuscript has become the holy grail of some Dickensians researchers JOHN CHIBTELAR finds out more

NEWSHOPPER.CO.UK

- ▶ Peter Stadlers has just found this old newspaper article about me
- ▶ [http://www.newshopper.co.uk/news/1754004-Looking\\_to\\_unlock\\_artist\\_\\_\\_\\_s\\_secrets/?ref=fbshr](http://www.newshopper.co.uk/news/1754004-Looking_to_unlock_artist____s_secrets/?ref=fbshr)
- ▶ concerning my search for a lost deedbox containing extremely important items of Seymouriana - in particular, a 350 page unpublished manuscript, The Life of Robert Seymour. This manuscript was the Holy Grail of my research, and I spent ages trying to find it. After this article was published I did find other material which was held in the deedbox - but the key item, the manuscript, has simply vanished. I strongly suspect that the manuscript was deliberately suppressed by Dickensians, perhaps because it contained material considered 'scandalous', or perhaps because it told a rather different account of the origins of The Pickwick Papers from the one put forward by Dickens.

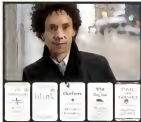
May 9



- I am again indebted to Peter Stadiera's wonderful enthusiasm for *Death and Mr Pickwick*. He has now found the earliest-known portrayal of a character in my novel, Nixon the Cheshire Prophet, otherwise known as Red-Faced Nixon.



May 10



- ▶ Yesterday, I watched a documentary about the musician Brian Eno, and both Eno himself, and an author who appeared in the documentary, Malcolm Gladwell, played a part in the creation of *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Let me begin with Gladwell. I wanted to find a model for the huge cultural phenomenon that was *The Pickwick Papers*. Of course many writers have spoken about *Pickwick's* small beginnings, when only 400 copies of the first serial part were sold, and further stated that at the time of the fourth serial part, sales were hitting 40,000. But the question remained: what were the likely social processes which produced the most successful novel in history? For my answer to that question, I was heavily influenced by the description of cultural epidemics in Gladwell's book *The Tipping Point*.



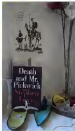
- ▶ The Tipping Point led me to think about the key players who might have spread the word about Pickwick - and the person who struck me as especially important was William Jordan, the Editor of the Literary Gazette. Jordan is known for writing to Dickens, regarding Sam Weller: "Develop this character to the utmost! but little attention has been paid to just how well-connected Jordan was. In his autobiography, he describes hundreds of people as friends- people in the Foreign Office, the Post Office, the Records Office, and the Admiralty, lawyers, physicians, politicians, country squires, explorers, peers, industrialists, writers, painters, priests, architects, engineers. What they all had in common was an interest in literature, if not writing themselves they served the interests of writers by providing information, serving on boards, and supplying work and patronage. With someone like Jordan taking up Pickwick you have the conditions for exponential growth in sales.



- And Brian Eno? When I was writing *Death and Mr Pickwick*, and had to concentrate especially hard on writing a section, I found Eno's ambient music, especially the album *On Land*, perfect for inducing the right, semi-meditative state of mind.



May 10



- ▶ Peter Stadlera's incredible enthusiasm for my novel is truly heart warming. A writer always hopes that a reader will respond sympathetically to his work, and Peter's response is everything I could ever wish for in a reader. It is not just that Peter has completed the 800-page journey that is *Death and Mr Pickwick* - he has gone beyond it, to search for works by artists who appear as characters, pictures of places that are featured, websites that give historical insights, and much more. Even this photograph, which accompanies his review of *Death and Mr Pickwick*, is a response to the work, with the image of Don Quixote above the book.

DICTIONARY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

CHARLES DICKENS  
THE PICKWICK PAPERS



- ▶ In a way, Peter has captured the very essence of the *Pickwick* phenomenon : in the heyday of *The Pickwick Papers*, people would seek pictures of places visited by Mr Pickwick, find out about historical characters mentioned in the book and so on. As I have said before, I wanted *Death and Mr Pickwick* to parallel *The Pickwick Papers* in various ways, and I could do that with regard to such things as the length of the book, and by the inclusion of inset stories, and by having a large cast of characters, but the one thing I could not do, to complete the set of parallels, was to create the response from readers that was akin to readers' response to *The Pickwick Papers*. Peter has done that. I want to thank you, Peter, from the bottom of my heart. His review of *Death and Mr Pickwick* now follows.



- ▶ Stephen Jarvis provided me with a proof copy of his novel *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Today I have finished reading this masterpiece. Here are my thoughts:
- ▶ Remembering joys that have passed away
- ▶ Reading Stephen Jarvis's monumental novel *Death and Mr Pickwick* was the best of times. It captured my heart, captured my memory, made me start research on all the places, times, anecdotes, characters, legends, caricaturists featured within the text. What a great piece of fiction, though it is based on facts, and superbly researched by an author who knows how to do that. Stephen manages with his narrating characters Scripty and Mr Inbelicate to employ a range from the pre-history of *The Pickwick Papers* to today's time. The style of his book is written in episodes, within-stories, biographic parts and catchy anecdotes.



- ▶ *Age of Coricoburists*
- ▶ Stephen takes you on a print-shop stroll from Gillray, Rowlandson, and Cruikshank through to Seymour. Though you certainly look up some pictures by those famous illustrators you come to know them on an intimate basis by the way the author presents them. I have never read biographies of artists in such a condensed and fascinating form.



- ▶ *Crime of the Century* - Controversy over the original concept of the *Pickwick Club*
- ▶ The framework plot forms the biography of Robert Seymour: his growing up, becoming a famous illustrator and losing the idea of his life - the original concept of the *Pickwickian* characters - to the relatively unknown Charles Dickens (nom de plume Boz), who became engaged as a writer by the publishers Chapman & Hall. Here the motif of non-existing people believed to exist (John Forster) also plays an important role, and the concept of *Pickwick* as a thin or fat man.





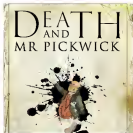
- Suicide, lawyers and justice are themes; and the contrast between moneymakers and artists - with Charles Dickens ("Chatham Charlie") as a new kind of artist who struck a deal with both of them and who was always in fear of being exposed and losing the wealth gained by the success of his first runaway bestseller *The Pickwick Papers*. In my opinion, Stephen Jarvis almost pities Charles Dickens and the pressure he was under all his life. But that's over when the author writes the biography of Robert Seymour's son, who probably also committed suicide, and who talks of the difficult financial situation the Seymours had ("never earned a penny from *Pickwick*") and the repellent behavior shown by Dickens, giving them no support and denying Seymour's role.



- ▶ *Two sides of the coin: Look behind the mask of the tragicomic clown*
- ▶ *The Pickwick Papers became a phenomenon of mass culture and popularity but behind the funny adventures of Mr Pickwick and his companions, in the real world, there is suicide, death, lunacy, isolation, what-if-scenarios, greed, fear and fear of failure. Therefore the dying-clown-motif of Joseph Grimaldi becomes so important. Funny outward appearance is accompanied by inward destruction. Put simply: a sentimental artist (Seymour) is destroyed by cold moneymakers (Dickens, Chapman/Hall). But what a masterly crafted narrative by Stephen Jarvis: catchy, realistic, page-turning - you know while reading the story that it will soon end up in tragedy.*



- ▶ *Death of an Era: Coaches vs. Trains* but *The Pickwick Papers* remains
- ▶ With the story of the White Hart Inn you see that the time of stagecoaches is over. Modern times means railways. *Moses Pickwick* takes off his wig and finally dies remembering the glory days of the coach. But *The Pickwick Papers* remains popular - in the Great War, during the Blitz and even afterwards. Countless editions of the book appear, along with souvenir mugs and all kinds of stuff. Had to laugh at the episode in *Death* and *Mr Pickwick* when two gentlemen start discussing how Mr Pickwick died and how old he was.



► Conclusion

► Yes, it's DEATH and Mr Pickwick. The *Pickwick* novel remains in its outstanding popularity but behind the novel, death takes its toll, sometimes disguised in 'funny bones' episodes, sometimes in outright horror and tragedy. Stephen Jarvis is the virtuoso chronicler of past and present. He tells the untold story of Robert Seymour's genius and his untimely end, and brings him back to the public memory. You have never read such a well-researched and breath-taking novel in your life.

► Truly, a masterpiece.

May 11



DEATH AND MR. PICKWICK by  
Stephen Jarvis | Kirkus

Regarded as the funniest novel in English  
literature, this is the best reading  
Charles Dickens ever wrote.

[www.kirkusreviews.com](http://www.kirkusreviews.com)

- ▶ **\*\*\*MAJOR NEWS\*\*\*** The American book magazine, *Kirkus*, which is known for its brutally honest reviews, has given *Death and Mr. Pickwick* a starred review and said: "Dickens himself would be proud of Jarvis' capture of so huge a slice of life." Read the full review here:
- ▶ <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/stephen-jarvis/death-and-mr-pickwick/>

May 11



- I thought I would post some photos I took some years ago, inside Seymour's house, where he killed himself. You will see here a fireplace...perhaps the very fireplace where Seymour burnt his *Pickwick* correspondence and papers after returning from a meeting with Dickens.



- An alcove...perhaps where Seymour sat in despair.



- A lower room ...where he might have breakfasted.





- And the staircase he would have descended, before dawn, on his last day on earth, en route to the garden where he raised the fowling gun to his chest. (And note the grim irony of a modern-day poster at the top of the picture referring to 'Dead Artists'.)

May 11



- ▶ Just seen the latest review of *Death and Mr Pickwick*, in the *New Statesman*. Here is the link: <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2015/05/nourishing-blood-novelist>

## May 12



- I am going through boxes of miscellaneous items acquired during the years of writing *Death and Mr Pickwick*...In New York Public Library, I found these photos of miniatures painted by Seymour showing his mother Elizabeth, and his wife Jane, as well as a self-portrait



- Next is a photo of Seymour's business card - a sketch of an unknown person is on the back and one can imagine Seymour simply doing a drawing on the reverse of his card, perhaps of someone he has just met, and handing the card over, as proof of his ability to capture a likeness.





- And here is Seymour's tombstone, photographed in the crypt of St Mary Magdalene's, Islington, a few moments after Elaine and I found it. Another tombstone is stuck to Seymour's stone by mud and decayed matter, and we did not attempt to prise the stones apart, in case it damaged any inscription underneath - however, the church unilaterally decided to do that without a second thought, and when we next encountered the stone we saw that the inscription was...nothing, a blank, even though other members of the family were buried afterwards in the same grave. The likelihood is that after the suicide, the Seymour family was too poor to afford a stonemason's fees.

# May 12



- ▶ Great new piece about *Death and Mr Pickwick* at NetGalley!  
<https://s2.netgalley.com/catalog/book/65974>
- ▶ “An extraordinary novel about an extraordinary novel - Charles Dickens’ *The Pickwick Papers*.”

# May 12



Yesterday's Papers: Death and Mr Pickwick – a novel

JOHN HEDCOCKBLOGSPOT.COM | BY JOHN HEDCOCK

- ▶ Another review, this time by a cartoonist and illustrator - he describes *Death and Mr Pickwick* as "a splendidly satisfying story."
- ▶ <http://john-adcock.blogspot.co.uk/2015/05/death-and-mr-pickwick-novel.html>

May 12



- Peter Stadlera has just posted these pictures of his gorgeous literary cat Sir Pelzi. This is what Sir Pelzi says: "*Death and Mr. Pickwick* is an astounding work of fiction and my favourite novel so far. Whoever wants to argue with me about it may come a step closer and feel the strike of my paw!"



# May 13



- ▶ Here is a peculiar, but sad, experience.
- ▶ *My mother, Joan Jarvis, died in 2004. In the last years of her life, she lived in Lakenheath in Suffolk, and right at the end, she was taken to hospital in Bury St Edmunds, where she died. On the day that happened, my brother and I were already at the hospital, and Elaine came up from London to join us, arriving shortly after the death. We needed somewhere to stay in the town, and so we went into the tourist information office and asked for help with accommodation. Elaine went to the desk, and the assistant started giving options which neither of us was in the right frame of mind to discuss, so Elaine said: "Just tell me the nearest place to here we could stay." It turned out this was...*



The Angel Hotel, 1851

- ▶ ...the Angel Hotel, where Mr Pickwick stayed in *The Pickwick Papers*. As I was already working on *Death and Mr Pickwick* when my mother died, I must have been aware, at some level, that Mr Pickwick went to the hotel, but with the emotional state I was in, this was driven from my mind. You can imagine the shock when I entered the hotel, and was faced with large images of Mr Pickwick on the walls. This literally was "Death and Mr Pickwick." It felt like a message from beyond the grave, as though my mother, as her last message to me, was wishing me good luck with the novel.
- ▶ And it is also worth noting the date she died: February 18th, the anniversary of the day when Dickens began work on *The Pickwick Papers*.



- And I have spoken before about how I used to read loads of American superhero comic books when I was kid, and that this was probably a factor in leading me to write about an illustrator as an adult. Well, after my mother died, I found two T-shirts in her bungalow, dating from when I was about 7 or 8 years old, which my mother embroidered for me, showing superheroes, and which I have now framed. It was the only time she ever did anything like that - she said that it would stop the shirts' iron-on transfers from fading. I might say now: to stop the influence of comic books fading.

May 13



- ▶ Peter Stadlera has now posted some pictures which are displayed in Dulwich Gallery. I mention the Gallery in *Death and Mr Pickwick* - I think Dulwich Gallery is a perfect symbol of my novel, because it is a mausoleum as well as an art gallery - it holds the bodies of the Gallery's founders, as well as a great collection of pictures. In other words it combines, in one place, the themes of mortality and art.
- ▶ The first picture is *The Triumph of David*. As Peter says: "Please have a close look at the horrid head on top of the pole!"



- ▶ Next, a self-portrait, by Joshua Reynolds. As Peter says: "He's almost looking at you, isn't he.")
- ▶ (Below is a self-portrait of an older Joshua Reynolds, also in Dulwich Gallery, and somewhat resembling Mr Pickwick!)





- And here is *Young Herdsman with Cows*, by Cuyp.

May 14



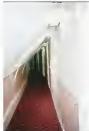
- ▶ I am continuing to sift through the boxes of material accumulated during the years of writing *Death and Mr Pickwick*...and here are photos taken when Elaine and I stayed at the Great White Horse Hotel in Ipswich.





- As readers of *The Pickwick Papers* know, this was the hotel where Mr Pickwick became lost in the corridors, and ended up entering a lady's bedroom by mistake. It was not QUITE the maze one might expect after reading Dickens, but certainly there were many staircases, and their presence seemed doubled by mirrors, and after a night of alcoholic indulgence, it could probably seem labyrinthine.









- In years gone by, visiting the hotel and staying in its Pickwick Room, was a great pilgrimage for lovers of *The Pickwick Papers*, but by the time I went there the hotel was very run down. The reception desk was rarely manned, and the hotel seemed to survive by attracting crowds to its bar with its offer of Stella at £1 a pint. (I am not joking.) Even at night, getting to sleep in the hotel proved difficult, with rowdy youths making a noise in the street. It is not surprising that The Great White Horse closed in 2006, and perhaps I was the last person to make a Pickwickian pilgrimage there. Although I didn't enjoy my stay, it is still very sad that one can no longer spend a night in the hotel visited by Mr Pickwick.



- ▶ A playbill displayed in the Great White Horse, mentioning Sam Weller and the Pickwickians.



- ▶ However, I googled the hotel last night, and it seems the facade survives, along with its statue of the horse. It is now a supplier of outdoor clothing and equipment, Cotswold Outdoor (see <http://community.cotswoldoutdoor.com/stores/ipswich/> ) and, to its credit, the store does mention Dickens on the website.

## May 14



- ▶ A piece about *Death and Mr Pickwick* has just appeared in *The Independent*. It was based upon a brief telephone interview, and the interviewer had not read the book, and so it's not surprising that there are a number of inaccuracies in the report, and the response of the Dickens Museum does not stand up, either. However, here it is:
- ▶ <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/did-dickens-send-his-illustrator-to-his-death-or-is-that-fiction-week-in-books-column-10249582.html>

May 15



- In my boxes of materials accumulated during the years of writing *Death and Mr Pickwick*, there are many old notepads, and one of these contains my scribbled records of an interview with the son of the late cartoonist Ged Melling. (Pronounced 'Jed'.) Ged's photo is shown here.

There's nothing  
more romantic than  
a candle-lit dinner



- I wanted my portrayal of Robert Seymour to be an accurate, believable and 'lively' presentation of a manic-depressive cartoonist, and so I wondered whether there were any modern cartoonists who could serve as a template for some of Seymour's behaviour. After a little research, I discovered that Melling - who was killed crossing a road in Bromley in 2007 - was indeed manic-depressive. So I contacted his son Jude, who agreed to meet me. Melling drew cartoons for *The Economist*, *The Times*, *Private Eye* and many other publications, and so as a tribute to the role he played, posthumously, in *Death and Mr Pickwick*, here are three of his cartoons I have found online.





May 15



- ▶ Here is the latest review of *Death and Mr Pickwick* from *The Times* by Robert Douglas-Fairhurst:
- ▶ Explaining how he wrote *The Ambassadors*, Henry James noted that all novels involve two stories. “There is the story of one’s hero” but also “the story of one’s story” – the hidden months of pen-chewing and paper-crumpling that lie behind any published work. In the case of Dickens’s first novel *The Pickwick Papers*, the story of how it came to be written is just as exciting as anything in the book itself.



Starting life as a loose collection of sporting sketches that began serialisation in 1836, by the time the final instalment was published in 1837, *Pickwick* had become a global phenomenon. There were commercial spin-offs such as *Fat Boy* pastries and *Weller* corduroys, and readers quoted the novel's best lines with all the glee of modern TV viewers repeating the latest catchphrases. By the time he was 27, Dickens had become the most famous novelist in the world. It was the literary equivalent of Clark Kent entering a phone booth as an anonymous journalist and exiting it as Superman.



- Or at least that's the usual version of events. Stephen Jarvis's hugely ambitious first novel offers a bold revisionist account. Here the human drama behind the scenes is a tragedy, and the hero is not Dickens but his first illustrator Robert Seymour. For most critics, Seymour is a minor character in the *Pickwick* story – a moody depressive who in 1836, after finishing his final illustration of a dying clown, walked out into his garden and shot himself. Here he proudly takes centre stage. Much of the story is told from his point of view, and even after he is discovered with his heart torn in pieces by a bullet, he continues to haunt the narrative like a restless and vengeful ghost.



- ▶ Before that we see him learning to draw, marrying despite his true sexual inclinations, and working out the underlying scheme of *Pickwick* in a series of vivid daydreams. Three hundred pages pass before Dickens arrives on the scene as "Chatham Charlie", a writer with a sharp eye and even sharper tongue, who steals Seymour's plans and then pretends they were his all along. Dickens may have been a genius, but Jarvis sides firmly with another artist, Katey Dickens (shown here) who after her father's death described him as "a wicked man — a very wicked man".



- ▶ In some ways this novel sits alongside recent sequels to *Peter Pan* by Geraldine McCaughrean and *Treasure Island* by Andrew Motion, a genre in which classic works of fiction are updated or adapted for modern readers. The difference here is Jarvis's ambivalence about his source. Beginning with his first sentence, a jokey echo of *Pickwick*'s opening, Jarvis's narrative structure is plainly a nod towards Dickens's playfully rambling novel, with its sprawling digressions and stories nested within stories. At the same time, no detail is too small for Jarvis or his narrator (they are hard to tell apart) to brood over, even if that means suspending the story for pages of clunky dialogue or forensic textual analysis. The result is curious hybrid: an attack on Dickens that is at its best when it is most Dickensian. At its worst it is more like being stuck in a lift with an unusually chatty conspiracy theorist.

ROBERT DOUGLAS-FAIRHURST

*Collected*

## BECOMING DICKENS

THE INVENTION OF A NOVELIST

*Illustrations*

*Illustrations*

- Jarvis is clearly aware that his novel will be compared to Dickens's, and accordingly he packs his writing with self-conscious puns on "Saymore" (say more) and the pleasures of "higgledy-piggledy" art. However, it is when he allows himself to create simple and memorable images of his own — the suction of mud when walking down Fleet Street, or the freedom of an etcher's needle that "moved through the wax like a skater" — that he offers clues about how good his next novel might be. This one, by contrast, is more like a curate's egg (and by an ostrich: there are good parts, and bad parts, but what you notice most is the fact that at 800 pages the whole thing is just too big. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst is author of *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist*.)

May 16



- ▶ In honour of Peter Stadler's literary cat Sir Pelzi, here is a selection of cat pictures by Seymour. Some are black-and-white, some coloured: pictures often sold in two versions, with the coloured ones commanding a higher price. The colour was painted on, by teams of overnight colourists. Several of these cat pictures are mentioned in *Death and Mr Pickwick*.
- ▶

















May 16



- ▶ **\*\*\*\*MAJOR NEWS\*\*\*\*** Amazing review of *Death and Mr Pickwick* in *The Sunday Times*. Here it is:
- ▶ An outstanding first novel pays homage to Dickens's genius, while accusing him of a shameful crime
- ▶ DID Charles Dickens have blood on his hands? Were he and his publishers complicit in a cover-up of malpractice that tipped a man into suicide and his family into penury? These questions ring through *Death and Mr Pickwick*, Stephen Jarvis's first novel, which aims to establish the artist Robert Seymour as the true originator of *The Pickwick Papers*.





- ▶ Retrieving Seymour from obscurity has long been a crusade for Jarvis. In 2005 he discovered his gravestone, crumbling among mounds of others in the pitch-dark crypt of an Islington church. In 2010 he had it placed in the garden of the Dickens Museum in Bloomsbury. This 802-page novel is a further monument to his faith in Seymour.
- ▶ The received version of the events at its core is that Dickens's rejection of one of Seymour's drawings for the second monthly number of *The Pickwick Papers* put fatal strain on the artist. Depressive and prone to breakdown, he brooded on the slight. Two days later, after burning the plates he was etching for *The Pickwick Papers* to the wall, he shot himself through the heart, blasting it to fragments and setting his clothes aflame.



- ▶ Dickens has been deemed guilty of, at worst, unthinkingly harassing a man with an unstable personality. Jarvis extends the charge-sheet, alleging that Dickens's claim to have originated *The Pickwick Papers* ("I thought of Mr Pickwick and wrote the first number") is "a lie". Along with his publishers and his belligerently partisan friend and biographer, John Forster, Dickens suppressed the fact that it was Seymour — applauded by his contemporaries as the "Shakespeare of Cancture" — who created Pickwick and his travelling companions. After the artist killed himself, humiliated at being brutally sidelined by a then hack writer brought in merely to add some text to the work's main attraction — Seymour's pictures — a shameful campaign of deception got underway.



- ▶ These contentions – previously aired by Jarvis in an essay – are substantially fleshed out, often in engrossing detail, in this voluminous novel. It opens with a scene that seems straight out of Dickens. As its narrator sits by a hearth, firelight flickers around a parlour crammed with curiosities – a stuffed rook, a stagecoach bugle – and flashes on the circular spectacles and shiny pate of a genial fat man addressing him. Mention of a flip chart flicks the reader back to the present. A lifelong devotee of *The Pickwick Papers* and firm believer that it was Seymour's brainchild, the man is, it emerges, seeking someone to arrange his vast accumulation of material on this topic into a book that will set the record straight. The ensuing pages chronicle the narrator's immersion in the task.



- ▶ The result turns out to be far more than an exercise in accusation. Just as *The Pickwick Papers* expanded from satire of a gullible old gent into something larger-spirited, Jarvis's novel exuberantly broadens out from indictment to celebration. Deploing Dickens's behaviour, it pays homage to his genius – not least by imitation. Like his fiction, it teems with vividly idiosyncratic characters, digressions, switches of mood, widespread story-lines that eventually enmesh, and flamboyantly imagined scenes that take you in and out of artists' quarters, debtors' prisons, lodging houses, coaching inns, fairs, factories, publishers' offices, law courts, theatres and clubs.



- ▶ Through this swarming diversity runs a fascination with the pleasures and pressures of creativity. This isn't only apparent in the clash over *The Pickwick Papers*, but in the world of Georgian print-makers – Gillray, Rowlandson, Cruickshank – which Jarvis brilliantly resurrects. There are riveting accounts of the delicate technical expertise behind their boisterously scurrilous cartoons; reminders of the crowds eagerly viewing their latest displays in print shops' bow windows.



- ▶ Jarvis catches Cruickshank in an image — “two thick groves of whiskers overhanging a laugh” — as inventively incisive as the artist’s own. Throughout, the prose is marvellously pictorial. A snuff-taker’s nose as he sniffs around the back of his hairy hand is “like an undernourished pig rooting in the undergrowth”. As someone chews, “pieces of pie were exposed...like a mouthful of ancient ruins, with the odd piece of half-eaten herb suggestive of ivy”. Speech is picturesque, too. Tankards tilt to the cry: “Down the red lane.”



- ▶ During the period the novel surveys – the cusp between the Georgian and Victorian eras – priests were pushed aside in popularity by print. Chiefly attributing this to the sensational impact of *The Pickwick Papers*, Jarvis packs his pages with scenes of enthralled fans reading its green-wrapped periodical instalments, from Cambridge colleges to labourers' gin shops, omnibuses to family circles. Hawkers sell Mr Pickwick hats, Sam Weller cordaroys, Pickwick penny cigars and Pickwick-shaped cakes with sugar plumascho. Exploring the work's wide, warm appeal, Jarvis has a Pickwick obsessive calculating that it features 846 characters, 36 breakfasts, 32 dinners, 10 luncheons, 10 teas and 8 suppers. Of its 100,000 "significant words", the most frequent (occurring 409 times) is "fried".
- ▶ Profusion is Jarvis's own favoured fictional technique. Bursting with colourful characters, his panoramic novel about the shady start and sunny breakthrough of a literary phenomenon is a phenomenon itself.

May 17



- ▶ I wanted to post again about the "MAJOR NEWS" story of last night, because I have now seen the published edition of the review in *The Sunday Times*, rather than the web edition, and the article appears as a double-page spread. (The visual impact of this is an emotional moment for me, in my attempt to bring back Seymour from obscurity after Dickens and his associates Edward Chapman and John Forster tried to airbrush the artist out of history. So here is the article in its visual form, and then, to read the text, please go to my post of last night.





- And you know, there are certain hints, from Dickens's letters, that he had fears that, one day, someone like me would come along and start investigating Seymour. I can remember reading a letter where Dickens talks about how the Seymour affair could re-emerge years in the future, long after his death. Indeed, in the 1920s, an American called Samuel Lambert tried to look into Seymour's case, and he found the Dickens Fellowship was most unwilling to talk to him - and shortly afterwards an attack on Lambert appeared in the journal *The Dickensian*, saying that the idea that Seymour had any significant role in the creation of *The Pickwick Papers* was "exploded long ago" and was not even worthy of serious consideration. I strongly suspect that the Fellowship of that era knew that Dickens had lied about Seymour and tried to hush it up.

May 17



- ▶ Another major review of *Death and Mr Pickwick*, this time by Lucasta Miller of *The Independent*:
- ▶ *DEATH AND MR PICKWICK* by Stephen Jarvis
- ▶ THRILLING SEARCH FOR PICKWICK AND THOSE WHO MADE HIM
- ▶ On 31 March 1836, a new entrant appeared in pre-Victorian London's already over-crowded, cut-throat literary marketplace: the first instalment of a serial entitled *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*. It showcased four engravings by the established illustrator Robert Seymour, who had initially come up with the idea. The text commissioned to go with them came from the pen of a 24-year-old journalist: "Boz", aka Charles Dickens.



- What happened next is well known. *Pickwick*, which was eventually published in book form, became a sensation, and a crucial staging post in Dickens's triumphant journey to literary immortality. The kindly, rotund hero Mr Pickwick and his sidekick Sam Weller ultimately became imprinted on the cultural consciousness as firmly as their literary predecessors, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. But after only two issues, Robert Seymour shot himself through the heart. Was his amour propre wounded because the pushy young writer had hijacked the project?



- ▶ "Who owns Pickwick?" is the question underlying Stephen Jarvis's remarkable new novel, which deals not so much with the anxiety of influence but with its anarchy, and the fluid identity-boundaries that mark the creative process. Interpolating himself (as "Scripty") into his narrative, Jarvis even admits to having taken on a physical resemblance to the character as a result of working on the novel, his formerly athletic waistline swollen by years of deskbound secking.
- ▶ Jarvis draws his unstoppable imaginative energy from the rigorous historical research he has clearly undertaken in pursuit of the fictional Pickwick and his real-life creators: not only Seymour and Dickens themselves but the publishers, readers, and prior literary and artistic figures - from the novelist Thomas Sterne to the cartoonists Rowlandson and Gilray - who ultimately made Pickwick possible.



- ▶ Jarvis creates a universe in which factual and fictional characters rub shoulders, but there is nothing preciously postmodern about his approach, and he never crudely intellectualises. Critics could bore for England about the influence of the 17th and 18th-century picaresque on the early Dickens; but Jarvis vigorously enacts their insights in his prose. Overtly, his sympathies seem to be with Seymour; stylistically, Dickens wins.
- ▶ Do not be off-put by that fact that this book is 800 pages long. It offers a reading experience as immersive as Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*, and as visionary in its capacity to connect us with past lives. As a former Man Booker judge, I will eat my hat if it doesn't make this year's list.

May 18



- Once again, I have been looking in my boxes of materials accumulated during the years of writing *Death and Mr Pickwick*. I came across a brochure for The Bull Inn in Rochester (now called The Royal Victoria and Bull) where *Mr Pickwick* stayed in *The Pickwick Papers*, and where I too spent a night, some years ago.



- ▶ However, my reason for going to Rochester was not solely to sample the atmosphere at The Bull - it was also to inspect an archive in the town, the Pickwickian collection of a certain Percy Fitzgerald (1834-1925), who is briefly mentioned in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Fitzgerald was one of the most enthusiastic fans of *The Pickwick Papers* ever, and he wrote a series of books about the novel.



- ▶ Although Fitzgerald was notoriously inaccurate - sometimes he would contradict himself within the pages of the same book - his passion for *The Pickwick Papers* cannot be denied. The titles of his books are themselves fascinating, including *The History of Pickwick*, and *The Pickwickian Dictionary and Cyclopedio*. These two titles alone are proof that *Pickwick* is different from other novels: what other novel can produce a history or a cyclopedia?





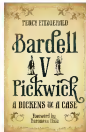
PROTEIN KINASE  
AND CYCLOPSIN

**THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO**

[illegible]

1. **THEORY**  
2. **EXPERIMENT**  
3. **CONCLUSION**







- There was also a curious volume that Fitzgerald wrote called *Pickwick Riddles and Perplexities*, which was probably the first example in the world of "blooper spotting." We have all seen those shows about movies in which Roman gladiators wear wristwatches - well, Fitzgerald did something similar in this book, where he drew attention to mistakes, continuity errors and puzzles in *The Pickwick Papers*. A good example is in the tale of the gravedigger Gabriel Grub, where it is stated that Grub shouldered his spade and lit his lantern - wouldn't it have been much easier to light the lantern first?

May 19

- In my boxes of items accumulated during the years of writing *Death and Mr Pickwick* there are many death certificates, including one for Robert Seymour's son.

DEATH CERTIFICATE

REGISTERED IN THE REGISTRY OF DEATHS

NAME OF DECEASED ROBERT SEYMOUR

AGE 24 SEX M DATE OF DEATH 1841

CAUSE OF DEATH ...

SIGNATURE OF REGISTRAR ...

24



- He lived an undistinguished life, and worked as a clerk for the South Eastern And Chatham Railway, at Canterbury.





- He appears in *Death and Mr Pickwick* as an old man, looking at items in a trunk, and he talks of the memories they bring back - similar to my trawl through the boxes, really. Among various drawings made by his father, he finds one shown here, which he examines as he contemplates his father's sexuality. Superficially, it is a drawing of a man with an ugly and enormous nose. It is of course a phallus, which frightens the woman who sees it.

# May 20



## Was Dickens a Thief?

A new novel portrays Maryann, sister of *The Pickwick Papers*, as a scolding  
barrister of modern mass culture

THEATLANTIC.COM | BY MICHAEL KAMET

- ▶ An extremely important article about *Death and Mr Pickwick* has just appeared in *The Atlantic* magazine. Let me just select two sentences from it: "Literature" is not a big enough category for *Pickwick*. It defined its own, a new one that we have learned to call 'entertainment'. " And: "(Jarvis's) Dickens belongs in a pantheon alongside not Balzac and Tolstoy but Jobs and Zuckerberg." On the eve of UK publication of *Death and Mr Pickwick*, I strongly recommend this article to you:  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/06/was-dickens-a-thief/392072/>

# May 21



Leo Sayer - The Show Must Go On ▶

Live 1974 Written by Leo Sayer

YouTube.com

\*\*\*UK PUBLICATION DAY OF DEATH  
AND MR PICKWICK\*\*\*

- ▶ It's here! As a 'fanfare', I have chosen a song in keeping with the sad clown motif - so here is *The Show Must Go On* by Leo Sayer  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6gEkfwazhE>



# May 21



**Death and Mr Pickwick by Stephen Jarvis review – an unrepentably Dickensian debut**

This story writes Pickwick's Papers, giving history a second life for those who were caught up in – and destroyed by – its blarney

THEGUARDIAN.COM | BY GUY TAYLOR

- ▶ Review in The Guardian:
- ▶ [http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/may/21/death-and-mr-pickwick-by-stephen-jarvis-review-dickensian-debut?CMP=share\\_btn\\_fb](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/may/21/death-and-mr-pickwick-by-stephen-jarvis-review-dickensian-debut?CMP=share_btn_fb)

# May 21



## Interview with Stephen Jarvis about Death and Mr Pickwick

Stephen Jarvis (Jarvis and Mr Pickwick is a Dickensian novel exploring the idea that persecuted Robert Seymour came up with the idea for The

Illustration by

- ▶ Here is an interview with me on the Foyles website. (One correction: I WAS a member of the Dickens Fellowship, but resigned in 2012.)
- ▶ <http://www.foyles.co.uk/stephen-jarvis>



# FOYLES

## Blog - A Pickwick paper trail

Matt Broughton, Senior Designer at Vintage Books, reveals how he came up with the jacket design for *Death and Mr Pickwick*, *Warfare* series, novel about the origins of The Pickwick Papers

FOYLES.CO.UK

- ▶ And, Foyles have also posted this about the evolution of the jacket of *Death and Mr Pickwick*: <http://www.foyles.co.uk/blog-pickwick-paper-trail>
- ▶ It features an interview with Matt Broughton, Senior Designer at Vintage Books, who reveals how he went about creating the jacket design.



▶ Matt Broughton, "Stephen Jarvis's enthralling first novel traces the genesis, and subsequent history of Charles Dickens' much-loved *The Pickwick Papers*. He offers a damning indictment of how an ambitious young writer appropriated another man's ideas and then engaged in an elaborate cover-up of the true origin of *The Pickwick Papers*. So how do we go about creating a book cover for such a story?"

▶ "The initial discussions between editor/author and designer revolved around the question should the jacket be simple or complex? Complex and colourful could convey that *Doth* and *Mr Pickwick* is vast, brimming with all sorts of characters and situations. An early idea from the author suggested we could illustrate a crowd gathered outside a nineteenth-century print-shop window, with the prints on display all being misinterpreted versions of Seymour pictures. The print-shop window scene was indeed used in pictures drawn by some of Seymour's fellow-artists, although not by Seymour himself."



- ▶ "The simple jacket approach would aim at summarising the book in a single image - perhaps the 'Dying Clown' motif - a Seymour drawing for Dickens that not only lies at the heart of Seymour's suicide, but could also be a symbol of Seymour himself.



- ▶ Another possibility was *Mr Pickwick Addresses the Club* - considered the *Mona Lisa* of book illustrations - which focussed on the eponymous hero himself.



- "We decided to take the simple route and save Seymour's illustrations for the endpapers. In which case we needed a device that would set the book apart from historical study, and suggest there was more to the underlying story. I figured that if we used the image of Pickwick addressing the club but zoomed in, making him the centre of attention, we could isolate this crop adopting such a graphic device. At first I considered Pickwick's pince-nez as the symbolic solution...



- "...and then the possibility of creating a structure around period typography.





- ▶ "However, given this was a book about an illustrator, a writer and the tensions between, the ink spatter became the obvious answer."



- There were a number of variations....



► Until...



- ▶ This design was settled upon.
- ▶ So who conceived *The Pickwick Papers*?
- ▶ Was *Pickwick* a creation of the artist Robert Seymour or a young journalist using the pen-name Boz? - and was it the ink of the artist or that of the writer?"

May 21



- ▶ Dan Franklin, my editor at Random House, has just informed me that the novel is reviewed in the latest *Times Literary Supplement*. I haven't seen it yet, but Dan says it is "very good". The cover is online, and it looks like I am the subject of the piece called "Mr Pickwick Meets Bob Dylan". As some of you know, a line from Dylan's song *Not Dark Yet* is quoted at the start of the novel, and there are other mentions of Dylan's work in the text too.

May 22



- ▶ Well, it's the morning after the night before, when I saw *Death and Mr Pickwick* on sale for the first time in Waterstones. Elaine and I went to celebrate in the London Street Brasserie in Reading, Berkshire. There was also the publication of the long article in the *Times Literary Supplement* "MR INBELICATE AND OTHERS: The crammed history of *Pickwick*, retold and reinvigorated". The reviewer, Lindsay Duguid, takes a very unusual approach: *Death and Mr Pickwick* is described as "original and very enjoyable", and then there follows a collection of details from the novel - as though the article is a précis of *Death and Mr Pickwick*.



May 23



- ▶ When he was a youth, Robert Seymour was apprenticed to a fabric pattern designer, Thomas Vaughan of Smithfield in London, and some of Vaughan's patterns survive, as shown here, and they may be inspected at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The museum also holds two of Seymour's sketchbooks. These sketchbooks are particularly intriguing, because they contain some pages of writing in pencil, presumably by Seymour himself - but unfortunately the pencil is too faded to read. Insofar as any words can be made out, they appear to describe a mental breakdown.





- ▶ I did ask the museum whether they could do anything to enhance the pencil, and make it readable, and they admitted that they **COULD** do something...but alas, they said they had their priorities, and Robert Seymour was not one of them. Even an appeal to the museum on my behalf, by the noted Cruikshank and Pickwick expert Professor Robert Patten failed to have an effect. Perhaps, if my novel raises Seymour's profile, these notebooks will be read one day, by some future Seymour-scholar.

# May 23



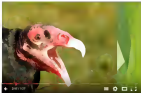
Vintage Vlog: Death and Mr Pickwick



271 views

- ▶ A new Vintage Vlog, featuring *Death and Mr Pickwick*:
- ▶ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpP\\_ji0ILm0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpP_ji0ILm0)

May 23



- ▶ A new video on the *Death and Mr Pickwick* youtube channel, *The Tale of the George and Vulture*:
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7u3ji--B2Q>
- ▶ (This is the fourth video to be posted on the channel  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCKD45EJx006-bEDYRT0ewJg>)
- ▶ Previous videos are: *The Mystery of Robert Seymour*, *The Greatest Literary Phenomenon in History* and *The Era of Caricature*.)

## May 25



- ▶ Over the weekend, Elaine and I went to St Albans, because it was on a visit to this town that I first told Elaine the concept of the book - and she instantly saw the book's potential, and backed it through to completion. St Albans also has a couple of associations - or rather POSSIBLE associations - with *The Pickwick Papers*, which make it worthy of a visit in its own right. Anyway, in the best traditions of *Pickwick*, here I am coming to the end of a meal in the Little Marrakech restaurant - the lamb shank tajine is to die for.



- And here I am sinking a pint of Erdinger in The Peahen pub. I did think The Peahen was the very place where I told Elaine about the novel for the first time, but now I am not so sure - once inside the pub, it just did not match my mental image of the moment of telling her. Of course the pub may have changed its decor. Or possibly I told her in another pub nearby - one former pub has now become a Jamie Oliver restaurant.



- ▶ We stayed overnight in an old hotel called The White Hart. This hotel claims to have inspired the incident in *The Pickwick Papers* where Mr Jingle talks of a lady whose head was knocked off as the coach she was riding upon passed under an arch: a lady was apparently killed in this way at the arch shown here (even if her head stayed on her shoulders) and her ghost apparently haunts the White Hart. I am not so sure that this is the actual source of the Pickwickian incident, though: there was a similar accident - which I describe in *Death and Mr Pickwick* - which occurred at the Golden Cross Inn, the very spot named in *The Pickwick Papers*.



- ▶ Another possible Pickwickian connection to St Albans occurs via Phiz's illustration for the Gabriel Grub story. It has been asserted that Phiz used St Albans Cathedral as the model for the Cathedral shown in the background to his picture. Again, I am not so sure. The real cathedral does not seem a very close match to the one in the picture. Anyway you'll see me in several poses by the Cathedral.









- ▶ Lastly, there is the town's medieval clock tower. This does not have Pickwickian associations per se, but a notice on the tower states that it was built near the site of The Eleanor Cross, where the body of Queen Eleanor rested - and a similar cross once stood at Charing Cross, the area of London where Mr Pickwick began his travels.

May 26



- On the way back from St Albans we stopped at The Betjeman Arms, at St Pancras, London, which is of course named after the poet and fan of *Pickwick*, Sir John Betjeman. The sausage rolls there are just about the best I have ever tasted.



- 500000 good, I think they require two photos to get across the wonder of their flavour. The accompanying Betjeman Ale was pretty marvellous, too



- ▶ Looking over the balcony at The Betjeman Arms, you can also see a place where I worked part-time, for a couple of years, during the early days of writing *Death and Mr Pickwick* - the Access Storage Centre, where I sold "clean, dry, safe and secure" storage space. (I will remember the sales schtick until the day when I am finally placed in my own storage unit in the ground.)



- After I had worked a half-day at Access, I would walk the short distance to the British Library, and carry out Pickwickian research - my mission was to read everything which had ever been written about *The Pickwick Papers*.



- The literature on *Pickwick* is vast, but one key text which guided me was Elliot D. Engel's *The Pickwick Papers: An Annotated Bibliography*. How I remember the green cover of this book! It lists hundreds of books and academic works on *The Pickwick Papers*. Although Elliot's book is in need of updating - it was published in 1990 - it remains the single most important guide to the literature on *Pickwick*.

May 26



- Peter Stadlera has just found this great pic of a *Mr Pickwick*-themed pipe tamper.



May 27



- My post today is long, meandering and varied, somewhat in the manner of both *The Pickwick Papers* itself and also *Death and Mr Pickwick*, and features some of my wanderings in London. First of all - here I am signing copies for Goldsboro Books...



► ...and for Foyles....



- ▶ ...and for a private collector.
- ▶ Book signing might SEEM an easy thing to do, but, trust me, adding a quote and a signature again and again is unbelievably mentally exhausting.



- So I had to regain my strength with a pulled pork brioche at the Running Horse pub in Mayfair. The Running Horse calls chips "jockey's whips", and very good they are too.



- Readers of *The Pickwick Papers* will recall that the Golden Cross inn is featured near the start of the novel; alas, the inn no longer survives, but there is a building called Golden Cross House. Indeed, at least until the 1930s, there were still some relics of the old inn, in the form of an arch and some cobbles, but these are now gone - perhaps destroyed in a World War II bombing raid, along with many other Pickwickian sites.



- ▶ There is, though, a pub nearby, the excellent Halfway to Heaven, and this pic shows me refreshing myself there.
- ▶ You may recall that, in *The Pickwick Papers*, Mr Jingle dragged Mr Pickwick to the safety of the Golden Cross, after the fight with the pugnacious cabman - well the posters on the walls of Halfway to Heaven show that the pub concerns itself with drag in a different sense. Do take a look at their website <http://www.halfway2heaven.net/> for details of their cabaret.



- Now, a bit more history. Here I am posing in the Haymarket, very close to Panton Street, at the site once occupied by the shop of the print publisher Thomas McLean, who features as a character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. His shop displayed the wares of the leading caricaturists of the early nineteenth century, including Robert Seymour, William Heath and George Cruikshank.



- ▶ Here for instance is one of Seymour's fishing pictures, "Waltonising" published by McLean, and taking its name from Izaak Walton, author of *The Compleat Angler*.





- Of course, the Haymarket is also home to the Haymarket Theatre, and that too features in *Death and Mr Pickwick*, when Seymour and his wife Jane watch the piggish-nosed actor John Liston perform in the play *Twould Puzzle a Conjuror*.



- Liston was one of the big stars of his day and is shown here as a piece of a Staffordshire Pottery.



- ▶ Lastly, we passed a poster for the Beatles show *Let It Be* - and, as I have mentioned in previous posts, The Beatles are the only cultural phenomenon that comes close to rivalling *Pickwick* - though *Pickwick* was much bigger. So here are the two huge cultural phenomena of the last two hundred years, coming together, with *Death* and *Mr Pickwick* in front of the *Let It Be* poster.

May 28



- ▶ When I was at school, I studied *King Lear* as part of the English syllabus, and it was the first work of literature to have a profound impact upon me. I haven't read *Lear* for many, many years, but it has some connections to *Death and Mr Pickwick*.
- ▶ Firstly, the novel has a section set in ancient Celtic Britain, featuring Prince Bladud, the legendary founder of the city of Bath - and Bladud was Lear's father.



GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH  
*The History of the Kings of Britain*

- ▶ Also, the story of King Lear - spelt as "King Lerr" - first appeared in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*. This medieval chronicle could be seen as a forerunner to the genre of fictionalised history of which *Death and Mr Pickwick* is an example - although it has to be said that *Death and Mr Pickwick* is considerably more fact-based than Geoffrey's work, which is now considered to have no value at all as history. The likelihood is that Geoffrey simply invented huge chunks of his history of Britain out of thin air, and even the parts that correspond to real historical events are inaccurate. There are, though, a few references to both Geoffrey and Lear in *Death and Mr Pickwick*...



- ...and on this basis Elaine and I set off for Oxford to view what was left of Osney Abbey, because Geoffrey's name appears on the Abbey's charter.





- But as you can see, hardly anything at all remains now of the once-great Abbey, little more indeed than a single arch.

May 28



- ▶ Frank Bouchier-Hayes has just found this image of a watchman's box. Such a box features in two important scenes in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Great find, Frank.



## May 29



- ▶ Two days ago, I went on a Pickwickian odyssey in the City of London with my old friend Greg Holmes.
- ▶ We had intended to meet in that most Pickwickian of places, the George & Vulture, but this restaurant is hidden away in a back alley - I have heard it said that only people who already know of the George & Vulture's location can find it - and we bumped into each other on the street in our search for the establishment. Accordingly, as we were a little early for our meal, we started the day at The Counting House pub. This has no Pickwickian associations as such, but it does have a Club Room, which seemed an appropriate place to raise a glass in honour of the club life which lies at the heart of *The Pickwick Papers*. We then moved on to the restaurant...



- And here you see me examining the George & Vulture's excellent menu, featuring traditional British fare.



- ▶ As we waited for the food to arrive, Mr Holmes caught me standing beside Seymour's picture *Mr Pickwick Addresses the Club.*



- But I was soon investigating the delicious interior of a steak and kidney pie, before embarking upon the joyous task of its destruction.

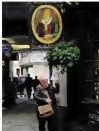




- Yorkshire Stingo beer, and a bottle of red wine, brought a benevolent flush to our cheeks, and the good-hearted waitress invited us to ascend the stairs to the restaurant's Dickens Room...



- ...where Mr Holmes, being the profound chronicler of our times that he is, recorded the very moment when I struck a Pickwickian pose.



- We left the G & V, but feeling that we needed more liquid fuel to prepare us for the rigours of the day, we entered the Old Doctor Butler's Head, which is named after the court physician to James I. This establishment is not actually mentioned in *The Pickwick Papers*, but we consoled ourselves with the thought that it should have been.



- We proceeded to sample its impressive selection of wares.







- This necessary task accomplished, we took to the streets, and visited the stone marker in Change Alley, showing the location once occupied by Garraway's Coffee House. Garraway's is mentioned in both *The Pickwick Papers* and *Death and Mr Pickwick*, and was the very place where Mr Pickwick wrote a note to his landlady Mrs Bardell.



- This is not the only reminder of Garraway's in the area - for at 32 Cornhill there is a bas-relief on a door panel, showing a scene from the coffee house.



- And not far away, at 38 Threadneedle Street, is a reminder of the location of the now-demolished South Sea House, as recorded in the metal lettering in the doorway. South Sea House was the temporary location of the bank Smith, Payne & Smiths, where George Beadnell - the father of Dickens's lost love Maria Beadnell - worked.



- We also noticed nearby the street sign for Lothbury. In the advertising prospectus for *The Pickwick Papers*, it was stated that the Pickwick Club was "closely entwined with the thousand interesting associations connected with Lothbury". Having a fair idea as to the nature of those interesting associations, we decided that a visit to another hostelry was overdue...



- ...and Mr Holmes, whose knowledge of the area is more extensive and particular than mine, suggested a visit to The Banker, where, once more, we found ourselves beaming with benevolence.





- ▶ But alas, the day was drawing on, and so I took the train home from Paddington - though admittedly we visited that station's Beer House, before shaking hands and going our separate ways.
- ▶ I am led to believe though, that Mr Holmes, being the dedicated fellow that he is, conducted additional Pickwickian research in The Tyburn at Edgware Road, and some reports suggest he did not return home until 2am...

## May 29



- ▶ Following on from my post mentioning Garraway's, Peter Stadlera has posted a picture of the coffee-house. Peter says: "Stephen Jarvis has posted another great stroller's tale of his, seeing many interesting *Pickwick* locations, eating, drinking and having a jolly good time. In *Death and Mr Pickwick* we come across Garraway's sandwiches - and here is the place you could buy those delicious sandwiches."



- Peter continues: "After a hard day out on the road, as we all know, you might need some Beecham's Pills (what they help for is illustrated by the pictures)..."







- ...and spending a day out on the dusty streets you may need a new brush and polish on your shoes. Best for that is Day & Martin, as Sam Weller recommends."



## May 29



- I have just heard that the first Dutch translation of a work that influenced *Pickwick* - and which is featured in *Death and Mr Pickwick* - namely, *Dr Syntax*, has just been published. It is translated by Martin Hulszenboom.

May 30



- ▶ In yesterday's post, I mentioned South Sea House, where the bank of Smith, Payne & Smiths was temporarily located, and this building is shown left. Below is the bank's normal building in Lombard Street.

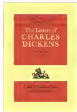




- ▶ Smith, Payne & Smiths employed George Beadnell (shown in this portrait), who brought Dickens into association with one of the most tragic characters in *Death and Mr Pickwick*, namely Thomas Clarke (whose name was sometimes spelt 'Clark'). As I wanted *Death and Mr Pickwick* to have parallels to *The Pickwick Papers*, I needed a character who was imprisoned for debt, just as Mr Pickwick was imprisoned. When I heard about Clarke, I knew I had found the man.



- ▶ Clarke was imprisoned for debt for over thirty years, and via George Beadnell, his case - that of Dew versus Clarke - was brought to Dickens's attention. Dickens proceeded to use the case in *The Pickwick Papers*: he embodied Clarke's predicament in the character of an imprisoned cobbler. It is especially interesting, though, that in a letter to George Beadnell, Dickens demonstrates that he was reluctant to acknowledge the sources of his material. He writes to Beadnell:
- ▶ "My Dear Sir
- ▶ I have purposely abstained from replying to your note before, in order that if our friend Mr Clarke communicated with you again, you might be enabled to tell him with perfect truth that you had heard nothing from me.



- ▶ My reason is this - if I were in the slightest instance whatever, to adopt any information so communicated, however much I invented upon it, the world would be informed one of these days - after my death perhaps - that I was not the sole author of *The Pickwick Papers* - that there were a great many other parties concerned - that a gentleman in the Fleet Prison perfectly well remembered stating in nearly the same words &c. &c. &c.. In short I prefer drawing upon my own imagination in such cases. Mr Clarke's own story I have put into a cobbler's mouth."
- ▶ So although Dickens SAYS that he prefers to use his own imagination, he nonetheless USES the material Clarke has sent him, BUT doesn't like to admit to doing so. This, I believe, is the earliest indication of the mindset which ultimately led to the hush-up of Seymour's role in *Pickwick*.

# May 31



- I mentioned yesterday the tragic case of Thomas Clarke, who was imprisoned for debt for over thirty years, and who features as a character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Clarke's imprisonment was the result of being sued by his cousin, Mrs Dew, who had herself been cruelly treated by her father, Ely Stott, a quack doctor and religious fanatic, who believed that all illnesses could be cured by the application of electric shocks.



- ▶ In one scene in *Death and Mr. Pickwick*, Stott beats his daughter with a thick copper wire attached to a rod, and I remember this was one of the scenes I discussed with my wife Elaine, when we spent ten days in Malta, specifically so I could get her responses to the novel, and perhaps incorporate changes she suggested. Ely Stott was a savage man and although the scene is horrific as it currently stands in the novel, it could have been even more violent. Elaine suggested that it should be toned down, and I agreed. Incidentally, there was a Pickwick bar in Malta, which no longer survives.





- And Malta's Grand Harbour, which we took a boat trip around, gets a brief mention in *Death and Mr Pickwick*.



- But our time in Malta also coincided with the death of Davy Jones of The Monkees. This was one of those celebrity deaths which really hit home, when it feels like a part of one's childhood has been torn away. Davy indeed had a connection to *The Pickwick Papers* himself...



- ....he played Sam Weller in a musical production of *Pickwick*.

# June 1



- ▶ I have mentioned before how astonishingly prolific Robert Seymour was as an artist. There is no complete catalogue of his works - though it is known to run to thousands of items - and every so often I see a picture of his which is new to me. On ebay recently, I saw this plate, apparently one of a series on the theme of travel, which I don't believe I have seen before.



- ▶ However, it is in a similar style to a series called *The Heiress*, and another called *Search after the Comfortable* featuring a character called Peter Pickle.









- In such works, Seymour was coming very close to the modern idea of a comic strip - a work featuring multiple pictures on a single page, and with at least some narrative connection between the pictures, even if it is a slender one. These should be seen as the immediate forerunners to *The Pickwick Papers* - and in *Pickwick*, Seymour obviously sought to embed his pictures in the full narrative that a text can provide.



## June 1



- ▶ Peter Stadlera has posted pictures from a rare Seymour work, *The Squib Annual*. Its importance to the history of *The Pickwick Papers* cannot be underestimated - because this is the work which started Seymour's association with Chapman and Hall, the publishers of *Pickwick*.

WITH TWELVE DESIGNS BY E. REYNOLDS.



LONDON:  
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 202, STRAND  
—  
NEW YORK.



LONDON: 1850.



THE BATHING PLACE



THE BATHING PLACE

# June 1



- I have just seen, in today's Times, Morton Morland's wonderful cartoon, commemorating the 200th anniversary of the death of the great cartoonist James Gillray. The cartoon reproduces Gillray's work *A Voluptuary Under the Horrors of Digestion*, except that the bloated figure of Sepp Blatter replaces the bloated figure of the Prince Regent. Gillray's cartoon is mentioned in *Death and Mr Pickwick*.

# June 1



- ▶ Peter Stadlera has posted this pic of a circle of ancient standing stones mentioned in *Death and Mr Pickwick* - one of the stones was defaced with the infamous "Bill Stumps", from *The Pickwick Papers*.



- Peter writes: "In *Death and Air Pickwick* we learn about the Stanton Moor Nine Ladies Stone Circle in Derbyshire. The stones lie at the centre of the moor - a low circle of worn gritstone blocks in a lovely location. Just to the south is a small standing stone - the King's Stone - and these are probably only a small part of what was once some sort of ceremonial area.



- "It is the most famous of the Bronze Age relics believed to have been constructed about 1500BC. Legend has it that nine ladies danced here on the Sabbath Day and were turned to stone as a punishment, along with the fiddler who stands nearby. And here are three crystal skulls visiting the Nine Ladies Stone Circle during the Winter Solstice."

## June 2



- Near the start of *Death and Mr Pickwick*, there is a scene involving a heavy-drinking club called The Briliants, who take their name from a beer, Brilliant Ale, brewed in Chandos Street, London. It so happened that, over the weekend, I was in Hythe, Kent, where the King's Head sells Brilliant Ale!

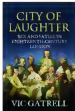




- ▶ Although there is probably no connection between this beer and the Chandos Street one, the beer HAD to become a photo. (Yes, I know, it looks like I am snorting the beer up my nostril.)



- And here is Thomas Rowlandson's watercolour *The Brilliants*, showing a meeting of the club. Rowlandson did a print of this scene, in which even more bottles of beer are in evidence, though unfortunately there doesn't seem to be a coloured version available online.



- ▶ Such scenes of drunken debauchery were very popular in the early nineteenth century, and are discussed extensively in the book *City of Laughter* by Vic Gatrell. This book exerted a profound influence on *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Gatrell focuses on the period immediately before the emergence of *The Pickwick Papers*, and the 'everything goes' culture of the London print shops. *The Pickwick Papers* could indeed be seen as a 'toned down' version of pictures such as *The Brilliantes* - there is still club life, and lots of alcohol is consumed, but the excesses of Rowlandson, in which drunkards would be shown vomiting and urinating, have disappeared. There has been a change in public morality. A new sort of caricaturist was required for this new age. So along came Robert Seymour...

## June 2



- ▶ The amazing Peter Stadler has just posted a pic of *The Pickwick Advertiser*, a a booklet full of advertisements which was sewn into the original serial parts of *The Pickwick Papers*. In the text of *Death and Mr Pickwick*, I do occasionally allude to products which appear in *The Pickwick Advertiser*. Peter has also posted a couple of newspaper items from the 1920s referring to the Lapham-Wallace Pickwick. This is one of the most valuable copies of *The Pickwick Papers* in the world. (NB: The journalists have made a couple of errors - referring to "Boz" when they mean "Buss" and "Philthorpe" when they mean Peilthorpe, a later illustrator of *Pickwick* - and I have posted the wrapper of Peilthorpe's 24 illustrations to *The Pickwick Club*.)

By Robert Seymour.



# TOOTH-ACHE.

MR. TOOTH-ACHE is a very famous character, who is known to all who have suffered from this painful complaint. He is a very old man, and has a very long list of names, which are given to him by the people who have suffered from this complaint. He is a very old man, and has a very long list of names, which are given to him by the people who have suffered from this complaint. He is a very old man, and has a very long list of names, which are given to him by the people who have suffered from this complaint.

Marke' Book Shop, 127 Broadway, specializes in first editions, of Charles Dickens. Its most prized possession is the Latham-Wallace copy of "Pickwick Papers." There they are, 12 Hills green-covered volumes with their original illustrations and the quaint advertisements of 1836. Now, in less than 80 years, they are members of the small but great aristocracy of Pickwick. Part III, illustrated by "Doe," is especially scarce. Only a few copies are known. The illustrations did not suit Dickens and were changed in the second issue.

of the "Morning Chronicle" to Dickens in 1837. The first editions include the Lopham-Wallace "Pickwick," recently purchased for \$4,000. Among the drawings are the Philthorpe originals for "Pickwick" based upon the original conceptions of "Phiz," but invested with a beauty and delicacy which the old drawings never had.



June 2



- ▶ Here is Martin Hulsenboom's new Dutch translation of *Doctor Syntax in Search of the Picturesque*, created by William Combe and Thomas Rowlandson, who both appear as characters in *Death and Mr Pickwick*.

## June 3



- ▶ I have mentioned before the holy grail of my research: the 350 page unpublished manuscript, *The Life of Robert Seymour*, by R. D. Morewood, who was a close associate of Seymour's son. The manuscript vanished in 1928 - I strongly suspect that it was deliberately suppressed by Dickensians - and my search for it probably added a year to the time I spent working on *Death and Mr Pickwick*. Although my hunt for the manuscript was unsuccessful, there was one heart-stopping moment when I thought I had found it: when I spoke to a Seymour collector on the phone, who said that he had "the Morewood album"...

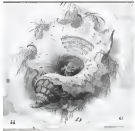




- Unfortunately, this wasn't the biographical manuscript, but a scrapbook of Seymour's pictures, collected by R. D. Morewood. The album contains proofs of Seymour pictures, alongside a few original drawings. So, here are several pages of proof cartoons for the magazine *Figaro in London*, but also some Seymour pictures in unfamiliar styles: a giant seashell, pictures of children, and some public characters.











- And here is Seymour's portrait of the drunken, cloak-wearing poet Thomas Campbell, the likely inspiration for Mr Snodgrass of *The Pickwick Papers*.

## June 3



### Home | Game of Thrones Role Play

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WWW.GAMEOFTHRONESROLEPLAY.COM

- ▶ I have just had a wonderful exchange of messages with Peter Stadlera. I wanted to share Peter's insights with everyone, so here is our dialogue.
- ▶ PETER STADLER: *The Pickwick Papers* is more than a novel, it's a world in miniature with so many characters and locations that you literally are drawn into this world, you participate and feel with the characters. In my opinion this novel was the first predecessor of those role play games in our times.
- ▶ STEPHEN JARVIS What a brilliant thought, Peter. The comparison to a role play game had never occurred to me before.



- ▶ PETER STADLER Yes, Stephen, if you look at the characters in *Death and Mr Pickwick* reciting whole passages from *Pickwick* or the talk of how Samuel *Pickwick* would handle this or that... Also the merchandising with *Pickwick* (ale, mugs, playing cards, even a pipe stopper), and people assuming the name *Pickwick*. The *Pickwick* characters serve as role models I think for generations. The fascinating thing is it went through all spheres of society - young and old were concerned and enjoyed the book. Today's mass phenomenon I think is *Game of Thrones* but in comparison to *Pickwick* on a much lower scale. *Pickwick* was a role play game in reality, it overcame the prison of the book.
- ▶



## June 3



- ▶ Frank Boudnier-Hayes has posted this Gillray picture of a barber's shop. This picture is mentioned in *Death and Mr Pickwick*.
- ▶ *A BARBER'S SHOP IN ASSIZE TIME* by JAMES GILLRAY, 1811
- ▶ This classic by James Gillray (1756-1815), the London-born father of the political cartoon, was inspired by a work called *A Barber Shop* etched in 1803 by Harry Bunbury (aka Henry William Bunbury).
- ▶ Entitled "Interior of a Barber's Shop in Assize Time", the heavy-drinking Gillray created this in 1811 while he was swamped with ultimately fatal insanity. It was to be his last print before his death aged 58 on 1st June, 1815. His passing went virtually unremarked upon except for a brief notice in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

## June 3



- ▶ **“Major News”** Death and Mr. Pickwick is named as one of the seven books you need to read this June. <http://www.vulture.com/2013/06/17/books-you-need-to-read-this-june.html#mediatb-share:vulture>

- ▶ This is what The Vulture says:

- ▶ [Death and Mr. Pickwick](#), by Stephen Jarvis

- ▶

Historical fiction always contends with the problem of how to fit research and hindsight seamlessly into an in-the-moment narrative. Jarvis meets the challenge ingeniously in this long semi-alternate history of Dickens's literary debut, *The Pickwick Papers*. His main character is a researcher hell-bent on proving that Boz's first character was stolen from the now-forgotten illustrator Robert Seymour. In the process, he unravels the social canvas of 1830s England in its boozey, frumpy glory, with a knack for puns and character sketches (and serial digressions) his idol would likely admire.

## June 3



- ▶ Peter Stadlera has just posted about John Gay's *Fables*, which was important in the history of illustrated fiction. I casually "namedrop" the book, near the start of *Death and Mr Pickwick*.
- ▶ As Peter says: "Besides his most famous work, *The Beggar's Opera*, John Gay also wrote *Fables* (also known as *Fifty-one Fables in Verse* or *Fables of John Gay* - part 1 released in 1727, part 2 in 1738) as we learn in *Death and Mr Pickwick*..."



- "Of course there were nice illustrations, e.g. *The Gout Without a Beard* by William Blake."



TABLE XX.

*The House and the Field.*

**T**HE HOUSE AND THE FIELD.

## June 4



- ▶ When you look at this map, you will probably think that it is a belated April Fool's joke - but it is not, I assure you. There really is an archipelago, in which the constituent islands are named after characters in *The Pickwick Papers*.



- Here you will find Snodgrass Island, Jingle Island, Tupman Island and more.



- My favourite among these islands, though, has to be Smiggers Island, in the north-east of the map (circled in red). Joseph Smiggers is one of the most minor characters in *The Pickwick Papers* - he appears briefly at the start, as the chairman of the meeting shown in Seymour's picture *Mr Pickwick Addresses the Club*. However, I do have a fondness for Jinks Island in the west (purple circle)- named after the court clerk in the Ipswich scenes - and Buzfuz Rock (green circle) in the south is not without its attractions.





- Admittedly there isn't much to do on Smiggers Island, as it is in the antarctic, but I include here a picture of one its residents, the Chinstrap Penguin, who appears to find all these proceedings amusing.

## June 4



Fig. 108 – **H. Carpenter**, 'Reproduction of the picture of the vampire', London, 2 Aug. 1845.  
The picture is a reproduction of the picture of the vampire, as it is called, in the 'Illustrated Press of Ireland and Britain' by Robin J. Kavanagh. The picture is a reproduction of the picture of the vampire, as it is called, in the 'Illustrated Press of Ireland and Britain' by Robin J. Kavanagh. The picture is a reproduction of the picture of the vampire, as it is called, in the 'Illustrated Press of Ireland and Britain' by Robin J. Kavanagh.

- ▶ Frank Bouchier-Hayes has discovered that some works by Seymour appear in a Ph D thesis, *Reform and Opposition in the 1830s as Viewed by the Illustrated Press of Ireland and Britain* by Robin J. Kavanagh. Here are three pictures from the thesis - the vampiric one is especially powerful. For an extended description of the vampiric picture, and indeed to see the entire thesis, go to Frank's post:
- ▶ <https://www.facebook.com/frank.bouchierhayes/posts/10153085176180547/?pref=story>
- ▶ Also, as Frank points out, a black-and-white version of the print can be found at: <http://www.ancient-celts.net/myths-legends-europe/mas-dracula-story-inspired-johann-fich-bloodsucking-chieftain-ireland-00299/> which asks whether Dracula was inspired by a bloodsucking Irish chieftain.



Fig. 2.107 H. Stappert: *The Enormous Black Rock, Lake Neuchâtel, Geneva 1840* (11.11.2014)



Fig. 2.108 H. Stappert: *Scene in a Fairy Tale and Fairy Stories, Geneva July 1840* (11.11.2014)

June 4



- ▶ Paul Sanders has just sent me this pic of the signed copy of *Death and Mr Pickwick* which he bought at Foyles. The inscription reads: "I cannot escape *The Pickwick Papers* and I never shall."

## June 5



- ▶ At the start of *Death and Mr Pickwick*, a magpie "curses" the Seymour family, when Seymour's father is unable to raise his hat in time before the bird flies away, thus violating the traditional superstitious codes of Somerset at that period. The magpie makes only that single appearance in the novel, although this scene is linked to something else that happens much later and creates a vast story arc. There were various reasons why the magpie seemed to me a perfect symbol to use at the start the novel - including the fact that it is traditionally seen as a voracious eater, like many of the characters in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. (Indeed, its scientific name, *Pica Pica*, gave rise to the name of an eating disorder, *Pica*, whose unfortunate sufferers eat earth.) They are also associated with theft - and, as the article about *Death and Mr Pickwick* in *The Atlantic* magazine asked recently: 'Was Dickens a Thief?'

June 5



- ▶ **\*\*\*Major News\*\*\*** According to the *Evening Standard* yesterday, *Death and Mr Pickwick* is now the No.2 bestselling work of fiction in London. (Kate Atkinson's *A God in Ruins* is No 1.) The single word description of *Death and Mr Pickwick* in the chart is: "Capacious".

## LONDON'S BESTSELLERS

### Fiction

1 **AS GOOD AS DEAD**  
by Ruth Ware  
(Thursday, 12th in British List)

2 **THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN**  
**by Rachel Watson**  
by Margaret Davies  
(Care, 12th in British List)

3 **FLOOD BY FIVE**  
by William Gold  
(Wednesday, 12th in British List)

4 **THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN**  
by Rachel Watson  
(Thursday, 12th in British List)

5 **A PLACE CALLED WHISTLE**  
by Philip Pullman  
(Friday, 12th in British List)

6 **OVER HORSE – THE**  
**VERSIONS OF US**  
by Laura Marshall  
(Saturday, 12th in British List)

### New Fiction

1 **ARCADE FIRE**  
by Anthony Browne  
(Friday, 12th in British List)

2 **MORE HUMAN**  
by Martin Amis  
(Saturday, 12th in British List)

3 **THEY**  
by John Julius Norwich  
(Sunday, 12th in British List)

4 **NOVEMBER**  
by Mark Haddon  
(Monday, 12th in British List)

5 **THE BEST MYTH**  
by Tim O'Shea  
(Tuesday, 12th in British List)

6 **THE HORSE – AGONY**  
**OF US**  
by Laura Marshall  
(Wednesday, 12th in British List)

- Here's the *Evening Standard* list of bestselling fiction in London, showing *Death and Mr Pickwick* at No. 2

June 6



THE MAN  
WHO NEVER  
WAS

- ▶ A minor motif of *Death and Mr Pickwick* concerns people who are believed to exist, but who actually do not exist at all. The odd thing is that, during my research for the book, I found myself looking for just such a non-existent person.





- The circumstances were these. As I have mentioned before, I spent ages searching, unsuccessfully, for the 'Holy Grail' - the 350 page unpublished manuscript, *The Life of Robert Seymour*, which vanished in 1928. The manuscript was put up for auction at Sotheby's in 1919, along with various other items of Seymouriana, all in a deedbox, and a marked copy of the auction catalogue had the buyer's name as "Mears". I hunted high and low for the mysterious Mears, without coming any closer to finding him or her...



- And then one day, I happened to mention my quest to the editor of a book collecting magazine, and he said: "Mears sounds like it could be a buying-in name." I had no idea what he meant, and so he explained that auction rooms used to adopt the practice of pretending that items had been sold if they failed to reach a reserve price. It was felt that unsold items depressed the mood in the auction room, and so the auctioneer would buy items under a pseudonym to keep the atmosphere buoyant.



Imaginary Man - Ray Davies

- ▶ That Mears was indeed a buying-in name was confirmed a couple of years later when a letter turned up in the British Library stating that the Seymour lot had failed to sell, because a very high reserve price had been set.

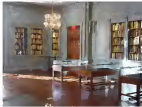
In *Death and Mr Pickwick*, there is actually a brief mention of the practice of buying-in because I wanted my wild goose chase to have some tangible result. Anyway, here is a song by Ray Davies - *Imaginary Man*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StJwRDRz8BQ>

## June 7



- ▶ The picture here shows Augustin Daly (1838-1899), one of the most influential men in the history of American theatre - a drama critic, theatre manager, playwright and stage director. Although he does not appear as a character in *Death and Mr Pickwick*, he plays a "behind the scenes" role - to use an appropriate metaphor - because he purchased Seymour's preliminary sketches for *The Pickwick Papers* at an auction, and this auction is mentioned in the novel.



- ▶ The sketches are now in Harvard University's Houghton Library, and I went there to examine them some years ago.
- ▶ One of the sketches, for the scene involving Dr Slammer, forms a crucial part of my portrayal of the initial meeting between Dickens and Seymour, which Frank Bouchier-Hayes mentioned in a post the other day.



- Frank said: "The scene in *Death and Mr Pickwick* which everyone is waiting for is the initial meeting between Dickens and Seymour which takes place at Fumival's Inn where Dickens then resided. It is quite simply one of the most remarkable fictional recreations I have ever read. I defy anyone not to be deeply moved by this key scene in the book. Indeed at times I found it almost unbearable to read this section of the novel. This of course is due to the fact that we have gotten to know Seymour so well at this point. But to say anything more would be to spoil the incredible experience that awaits the patient reader (the scene begins at page 488). The central point is that you need to have travelled the full distance of the novel in all its various meanderings until this point to fully appreciate this terrific scene."



- At this meeting, Dickens makes his first unwelcome 'intrusion' into Seymour's scheme, when he suggests that the artist should reposition the arm of Dr Slammer. In the sketch, you can see both the original position of the arm, and the alteration, as a ghostly addition at Slammer's elbow.





- ▶ And here is the final published version.
- ▶ Stored alongside the sketches was a letter from Seymour's son. In it, he uses a line which I transferred to *Death and Mr Pickwick*: "Dickens carries his bias for fictitious narrative to ultra-professional length." It is one of the most splendid ways of calling someone a liar I have ever encountered.



## June 7



- ▶ Peter Stadlera has now posted about the great clown Joseph Grimaldi, whose grave is shown on the left:
- ▶ "In 1837 Charles Dickens edited the memoirs of the great comic Joseph Grimaldi, who had just died, aged 58, wrecked by the hard physical labour of pantomime and by a sequence of emotional catastrophes like a script for a melodrama. (Father abused him. Brother ran away to sea. Young love died. Son expired a drunkard.)



- ▶ "Grimaldi left a first-person manuscript, which had had a choppy edit before Dickens turned it into a third-person narrative (Stephen knows the man who's in search of the original manuscript!)"



- "You could call the result a celebrity biography, since Grimaldi was the most famous clown of the British stage, drawing adoring crowds across the country, and fought over by three London theatres. (He managed to appear at two in a night by running between them, sometimes in full costume and makeup.)



- ▶ "But his story comes over as truly peculiar, with an inconsequentiality unexpected of the famous - eerie crime and gory accidents mashed up with box-office returns and conversations with Byron; there are plenty of interesting anecdotes and the tragic story of Joe Junior: 'Young Joe had received a severe blow on the head from a staff, which crushing his hat, alighted on the skull and inflicted a desperate wound. It is supposed that this unfortunate event disordered his intellects, as from that time, instead of the kind and affectionate son he had previously been, he became a wild and furious savage.'



- "In 2002 Gibraltar issued a stamp of Grimaldi. This biography really was an interesting read following up *Death and Mr Pickwick...*"

## June 7



- ▶ Frank Boucher-Hayes has just posted this pic of one of the characters in *Death and Mr Pickwick*.
- ▶ Frank adds: "Justice Stephen Gaselee is commonly held to be the model for the judge in the *Bardell v. Pickwick* case. A humorous exchange between the judge and his clerk takes place in *Death and Mr Pickwick* alluding to this very matter. In prose worthy of Dickens himself, the judge is described as having fingers "splayed in ten directions of bulbosity upon the desk." Following this interaction a conversation takes place between the judge and his servant who is said to have "a face as long and unemotional as a cliff."

## June 7



- It's also fun to take a pic of *Death and Mr Pickwick* in a particular location. Here's a pic by Cynthia St John, who is a great fan of the novel. Thanks for posting this, Cynthia.

June 7



- ▶ *Death and Mr Pickwick* opens with a number of quotes, the last of which is *The Show Must Go On* - the title of the song by Queen. Peter Stadlera has just posted about this, and shown how the lyrics chime with *Death and Mr Pickwick*.



# QUEEN



- Peter Stadlera: "The last quote at the beginning of *Death and Mr Pickwick* is "The Show Must Go On", a song by Queen. But what a song! That song, taken from their 90s album *Innuendo* perfectly sets the frame, bringing in the main motifs which Stephen in his masterpiece brilliantly writes upon.



- "I have just taken a few excerpts of the lyrics of this song:  
'Another hero - another mindless crime (you know the persons)  
Behind the curtain, in the pantomime...My make-up may be flaking...



- "But my smile, still, stays on!  
(Grimaldi's last performance  
confined to a chair.)"

## June 8



- ▶ My wife Elaine has just returned from New York, and in the famous literary hotel, The Algonquin, she discovered that the queen of the hotel, the resident cat, Matilda, is a fan of *Death and Mr Pickwick*. "Is it the case," purred Matilda, "that the UK edition is published by Random House?" When Elaine confirmed that that was indeed so (one never contradicts Matilda), Matilda said: "I am so glad that in the USA the publisher is Furrrier, Mouse and Grrrrrows."
- ▶ (Thanks to Milene Fernandez of *Epoch Times* for taking the photo.)

## June 8



- ▶ The review of *Death and Mr Pickwick* in yesterday's *Sunday Telegraph* describes the novel as "A MASTERPIECE OF IMAGINATION SUPPORTED BY A MOUNTAIN OF RESEARCH." Here is the link to Christian House's review, headed "The Unexpected Return of Mr Pickwick - Christian House welcomes a tale of Dickensian deceit."
- ▶ [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/charles-dickens/11654498/Death-and-Mr-Pickwick-review-a-masterpiece-of-imagination.html#disqus\\_thread](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/charles-dickens/11654498/Death-and-Mr-Pickwick-review-a-masterpiece-of-imagination.html#disqus_thread)

## June 9



THE CATS IN A BARROW. A THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE OF MIAOWING.

- ▶ Peter Stadlera recently posted this picture of 'cats in a barrow'. This phrase occurs in an early scene in *Death and Mr Pickwick*, when the actor John Bannister meets the artist Thomas Rowlandson in a pub, and another drinker mentions seeing Bannister's 'cats in a barrow' - a theatrical performance of miaowing. But although Rowlandson is the main character in this scene, Bannister is interesting in his own right - as a rogue.

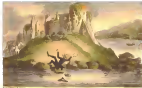


- Because in his *Memoirs*, Bannister takes practically all the credit for having invented the *Pickwick*-forerunner Doctor Syntax. I remember reading the *Memoirs* and thinking: "I simply don't believe this."



- ▶ What's more, Rowlandson had **ALREADY FOUND** the model for Doctor Syntax - a painfully thin vicar, the Reverend Ralph Baron, and sketched him delivering a sermon in the parish church of St Breward's in Cornwall.





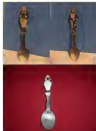
- ▶ Accordingly, I wrote the scene with Rowlandson as the inventor of Syntax, but as a nod to this part of Bannister's *Memoirs*, I had Bannister saying to the drinker, after Rowlandson had left: "If I know my friend, and I do, he will come to me shortly to help him develop his scheme. Sometimes his imagination is as dry as his throat." Of course, taking credit for another person's ideas is something we will encounter later in *Death* and *Mr Pickwick*, in connection with *The Pickwick Papers*.

## June 9



- ▶ Yesterday, when I posted about Matilda the cat, I had Matilda suggesting that *Death and Mr Pickwick* was published by "Random Mouse". I was absolutely delighted to see today that my friend Nuria Reina Bachot, who is the Spanish translator of *The Railway Children*, has created this image of that very publisher. Fantastic, Nuria. I love it! Thank you very much indeed. (The mouse toy is available at: [https://www.etsy.com/shop/feltimgdreams?ref=seller\\_info](https://www.etsy.com/shop/feltimgdreams?ref=seller_info))

## June 9



- ▶ Frank Bouchier-Hayes has just posted about these Pickwickian spoons:
- ▶ "To celebrate the publication of *The Pickwick Papers* in its entirety, a party is held at which apostle spoons with Pickwick-related figures, instead of Biblical one's, are presented to Dickens from which rum is drunk by those in attendance. It is a nice touch of the author of *Death and Mr Pickwick* to have Dickens being restrained from assuming the pose of Pickwick addressing the club by the ever vigilant Forster who may have been thinking not only of the dignity of literature but also of the indecent message which striking such a pose may have produced in the minds of some of those present with potentially negative consequences for his newly acquired friend."

## June 9



- ▶ Just realised that today is the anniversary of Dickens's death. In the first draft of *Death and Mr Pickwick*, I began the novel at Dickens's funeral, at Westminster Abbey. Although I eventually dropped this intro, and replaced it with the opening dialogue between Mr Inbelicate and Scripty, some of the scene was incorporated in the section "Mr Inbelicate's Narrative", near the end of the novel.

## June 10



- ▶ In 1886, a very strange edition of *The Pickwick Papers* was published by Goodall, Backhouse & Co, which I mention in *Death and Mr Pickwick*. It was strange for three reasons. Firstly, it only cost a penny - and yet it contained the entire, unabridged *Pickwick Papers*, double-columned, in tiny print, with twenty new illustrations. Secondly, it was an edition with an enormous print run of half a million copies. Thirdly, Goodall, Backhouse & Co were food manufacturers, and were most famous for making a hugely popular brown sauce called Yorkshire Relish.



- The book's crudely-drawn version of Seymour's illustration "Mr Pickwick Addresses the Club" shows Mr Pickwick standing on a chair, holding a bottle of Yorkshire Relish aloft, while the members of the Pickwick Club discuss the company's other products such as custard powder, baking powder and egg powder.



- For some reason, the popularity of Yorkshire Relish declined in the UK, but it retained its popularity in Ireland, where it is still made, though nowadays it is manufactured by Chivers, and its name has been abbreviated to YR Sauce. I have never seen this sauce on sale in the UK, but Elaine saw it in an Irish shop in New York a couple of days ago, en route to meeting Matilda, the Algonquin Hotel's cat.



- So, I tried the sauce for the first time yesterday, on a potato croquette. I have to say it is marvellous! **MUCH** better than other brands of brown sauce. It has a piquant fruitiness, which lingers pleasantly after the meal. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.**







- ▶ Actually, the Goodall, Backhouse & Co edition of *Pickwick* is unusual for a fourth reason. Although half a million copies were printed, hardly any copies survive, presumably because the quality of paper was so poor. I have seen a copy in the British Library, but I can find no images of the book online, and there are apparently no copies currently available for sale at antique book dealers. So, if you ever see the Goodall, Backhouse & Co *Pickwick* in a secondhand bookshop, or at a car boot sale, I would strongly advise you to purchase it. It is the Passenger Pigeon of *Pickwickiana* - something which once existed in huge quantities, but is now so rare it could be considered extinct.

## June 10



- ▶ Peter Stadlera has posted these great pics relating to the Kemble acting family, of whom Sarah Siddons was a member. I discovered recently that there is a Sarah Siddons Society in the USA, whose mission is to fund promising theatre students.
- ▶ Peter Stadlera: "In *Death and Mr Pickwick* we meet The Kemble family. At the turn of the 19th century the Kemble family dominated the London stage. Actor John Philip Kemble was said to be the finest actor in England.



- "And his sister, Sarah Siddons, was regarded as one of the greatest ever tragedians."





- ▶ "Their parents had been strolling players and John had earned a similar living on the road and in provincial theatres. Their younger brother Charles Kemble and his daughter Fanny were later stars of the London stage in the 1830s. Sarah Siddons was first introduced to David Garrick when nearing the end of his career. He brought her to London in 1775, but she failed to make an immediate impression on the public. Siddons returned to London six years later, at Drury Lane, under the management of playwright Richard Sheridan. She played 60 times in seven different parts in her first proper London season, inducing faintings and hysterics amongst her audiences.



INTERIOR OF COVENT GARDEN THEATRE.  
FROM A PICTURE BY J. H. B. FOR THE ENGRAVER.

- ▶ "John Philip Kemble made his debut on the London stage in 1763 as Hamlet. His acting style was static and declamatory, with long sweeping lines and a detached grandeur. He excelled in tragic Shakespearean roles. One critic said he was absolutely electrified by the actor's transition as Romeo, from gallant lover to anguished avenger, and Kemble's style became the style of London for three decades. However he was not a natural comedian or suited to romantic leads. The first of a long line of 19th century actor-managers, Kemble took over management of Covent Garden in 1803, but his tenure was not a happy one. The theatre burnt down in 1808 and when it was rebuilt the following year, Kemble raised prices to cover costs resulting in the now infamous old price riots. (You can read in Dickens's *Grimaldi* biography about that)"

## June 11



- ▶ Yesterday, I had lunch in Smithfield with an old acquaintance of mine, David Goldsmith, who takes a special interest in *The Book of Christmas*, Seymour's ill-fated collaboration with the writer TK Hervey: a book which contains some of Seymour's finest work, but unfortunately appeared after Christmas, and so sold hardly any copies.



- We met in the Hand and Shears, a pub which I mention in *Death and Mr Pickwick*...



- ...and then went for lunch at the nearby Butcher's Hook and Cleaver.





- This pub has many old pictures on the walls, and I was delighted to see that there was one by Seymour, featuring two dustmen. It was located on the wall next to where I am embarking tentatively upon a steak and ale pie...



- And here it is, on the left.
- Furthermore, the pub has a rare picture, *The Monopolist*, by Robert Buss.





- As many of you know, Buss temporarily became the *Pickwick* artist after Seymour's suicide, but was fired, and left mentally scarred by the experience. The interesting thing about this picture, which Buss produced as a painting in 1840, is that the character portrayed bears a resemblance to Mr Pickwick. One wonders whether Buss was trying to 'prove' that he could have been the *Pickwick* artist, and that he did not deserve to be fired. This desire was undoubtedly the motivation for Buss's most famous picture, *Dickens's Dream*, which he was working on at the time of his death in 1875, but *The Monopolist* suggests that Buss had similar desires many years earlier.



- Anyway, David and I chatted away about *The Book of Christmas*. He had just said that Seymour's picture of the Norfolk coach was actually very accurate in showing the overloading of a vehicle with turkeys, when a lady from the brewery, who was conducting a customer satisfaction survey, came over and asked what the pub could do to improve its performance.



- I suspect that it was with that special sort of boldness that only pints at lunchtime can engender that I answered: "Put up more pictures by Robert Seymour."

# June 11

## LONDON'S BESTSELLERS

### Fiction

#### 1. DEATH AND MR PICKWICK

by Stephen Jarvis  
(Cape £20) Fantastic.

#### 2. A GOD IN RUINS

by Kate Atkinson  
(Doubleday £20) It's Today's  
Sun.

#### 3. FLOOD OF FIRE

by Anthony Browne

### Non-Fiction

#### 1. ARDENNES 1944

by Antony Beevor  
(Oxford £25) [bbc.com](http://bbc.com)

#### 2. MORE HUMAN

by Steve Hilton  
(H Allen £10.99) Kindness.

#### 3. THE DIET MYTH

by Tim Spector  
(Bantam £9.99) Cat In Hat.

▶ \*\*\*\*MAJOR NEWS\*\*\*\*MAJOR NEWS\*\*\*\*

▶ *Death and Mr Pickwick* is the #1 bestselling fiction in London, according to the *Evening Standard* chart!